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FOOD PRODUCTION—THE IDYLIC ASPECT: Ploughing in North-West India

*British Overseas Airways Corporation*

# IN QUEST OF CIVILIZATION

*by*

RONALD LATHAM, M.A.(Oxon.)

To  
LYDIA

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'We shall find that, when men first appeared on the earth, they did not immediately light upon the mode of life that prevails today; but they provided it for themselves, bit by bit, through their combined exertions.'

ISOCRATES: *Panegyric* 39. (c. 380 B.C.)

'Man by birth had desire. When it is not satisfied, he cannot be without a craving for satisfaction. When this is without measure or limit, there cannot but be strife. Thence springs disorder; thence poverty. The ancient kings established the rules of propriety and right to set bounds to this confusion, to educate and nourish men's desires, to give an outlet for this craving for satisfaction, that desire might never be extinguished by things nor things used up by desire.'

*Hsün-Tze*, Chap. xix. (c. 350 B.C.)

'The Science of Experience set itself to study afresh and methodically the annals of mankind. . . . The motive was . . . to draw from the past its lessons of failure or success in order to gain guidance for the future. . . . It was learnt by what means men had succeeded, here and there and from time to time, in creating lofty and brilliant civilizations and why, again and again, they had fallen into disaster. Everything was traced back in the end to the actions, or inactions, of individual persons. . . . No imagined "Destiny", or Historical Necessity", or "Spirit of the Age", decide the fortunes of peoples. . . . Individual men and women, singly or together, in solitude or in societies—thinkers, reaching conclusions that are sound or unsound; leaders, choosing their paths wisely or unwisely; citizens, using their influence rightly or wrongly, or neglecting to use it at all; soldiers, fighting or refusing to fight; students, deciding what to learn; workers, what work to do—it is they who sow the seed, hour by hour, which they themselves will reap in harvests of well-being or of misery.'

VISCOUNT SAMUEL: *An Unknown Land*, p. 99. AD 1942)

## PREFACE

This book grew out of a course of lectures given by the author at the Working Men's College, St. Pancras, in 1938, and greatly enjoyed by the lecturer. The readers to whom it is addressed are people like the students there, not 'scholars' in either sense of the term but intelligent adults whose knowledge happens to lie in other fields than those of ancient history.

Since this is a study of the past for the light it can throw on the present and the future, special prominence has been given to issues of topical significance; but they have been presented as far as possible objectively and as they appeared to contemporaries. Certain sections, therefore, are almost anthologies of ancient pronouncements on civilization and its problems, with a minimum of elucidation. The translations from Greek and Latin are the author's own. Those from Oriental languages are based on standard versions, including the *Revised Version* of the *Old Testament*. For the sake of brevity and intelligibility, the text has sometimes been treated rather freely by modern standards of scholarship. I hope, however, that of these sections at any rate I may say (in the words of Confucius): 'I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own.' Where I have gone astray, I can only hope that, like Confucius, I may be able to congratulate myself on the unfailing regularity with which my mistakes are detected.

Acknowledgments are due to the following for permission to reproduce extracts from published translations, which I have occasionally taken the liberty of condensing: Messrs. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., for Arthur Waley's version of Confucius and the *Tao Tê Ching*, besides the introductory quotation from Lord Samuel's *Unknown Land*; the Calcutta University Press, for Dr. Bhandarkar's *Asoka*; the Cambridge University Press for passages cited in the *Cambridge Ancient History* and the *Cambridge History of India*; Jonathan Cape, Ltd., for H. G. Creel's *Birth of China*; the Chicago University Press for D. D. Luckenbill's *Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia*; the Clarendon Press for Sir Leonard Woolley's *The Sumerians*; Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., for L. D. Barnett's version of the *Bhagavadgītā*; Dr. M. N. Dhalla for his *History of Zoroastrian Civilization* (Clarendon Press of New York); Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., for A. Moret's *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* and E. J. Thomas's *Early Buddhist Scriptures*; Messrs. Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., for H. A. Giles's *Gems of Chinese Literature: Prose* and the same author's translation of the works of Chuang-Tze (Bernard Quaritch, Ltd.); Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., and the representatives of the late Mr. L. A. Lyall for the latter's translation of Mencius; Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd., for Erman and Blackman's *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*; Mr. Arthur Probsthain for versions of *The Ethical and Political Works of Moise*, by Y. P. Mei, and of *The Works of Hsüntze*, by H. H. Dubs; and Messrs. Scribners, Ltd., for J. H. Breasted's *The Dawn of Conscience*.

My thanks are also due to Dr. Saxl of the Warburg Institute and to officials of the British Museum, the Royal Geographical Society and the British Overseas Airways Corporation for advice and assistance in procuring illustrations, and to Mrs. Caroline Lucas, Mr. M. N. Lubin and Mr. John Morris for permission to reproduce original photographs.

I should like at the same time to put on record my gratitude both to the ancient writers themselves, from whose wrestling with the problems of their own day I personally have drawn inspiration to face the problems of the present, and also to the many generations of scholars to whose labour of interpretation every page of this book owes a debt which I have seldom attempted to acknowledge.

Of the many friends who have helped me with advice and criticism I will name only (without otherwise implicating them) Mr. M. N. Lubin, who read the work in manuscript, and my colleague, Mr. R. B. Pugh, who read it in proof.

But the greatest debt of all is due to that world-wide multitude who have made it possible once more to look for Civilization not only in the past but in the future.

RONALD LATHAM.

Caterham.  
1946.

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*The Quest Defined*

IT is still true today, though certainly not so true as when this chapter first took shape in the storm-charged atmosphere of 1939, that any mention of the word 'civilization' is likely to provoke one of two seemingly contradictory reactions. To some people the word stands for a remote, perhaps unattainable, ideal—a way of life quite different from ours, whether it be simpler or more complex, blest with greater freedom or with more efficient regulation. Others say rather that 'civilization' has been tried and found wanting and is now heading rapidly for an unlamented grave. In fact, whether they apply the term to ideal or to actual human society, both parties mean the same thing. They are registering the recent rediscovery of a truth which past ages have known well enough but the last few generations have been tempted to overlook: that the existing structure of society is neither perfect nor permanent nor automatically and inevitably 'progressive'. From this upsetting discovery some sensitive souls have fled to that ancient ark of refuge, fatalism. They see humanity helpless in the grip of vast impersonal forces and, despairingly or with a show of cynical indifference, they wash their hands of the future. Because 'progress' is not an obvious fact of the contemporary world, they dismiss it as an illusion.<sup>1</sup>

This dangerous mood (it can scarcely be called a belief) is not a logical conclusion to which we are driven by experience. If we cannot be sure that a favouring breeze is wafting us irresistibly towards a friendly shore, there is no evidence in science or in history of an overwhelming current running counter to human endeavour. Our trouble is rather that (as Seneca put it) 'to those who do not know what port they are making for, no wind is favourable'. Progress depends on ourselves. By making use of wind and current we can sail where we will. Our existing 'civilization'—the inverted commas express that blend of apology and irony in which the word is customarily uttered—our 'civilization' is as we and our ancestors have made it; it will become what we and our descendants think fit to make of it.

If we try to define 'civilization' as a *thing*—an actual or conceivable form of society or mode of life—we shall scarcely find two people to agree what it is we are looking for. There will be much more general agreement if we define it as primarily a *process*. We may say, in Aristotelian language, that a human community becomes more civilized in proportion as it brings into action the potentialities of its environment and of its own members in fulfilment of their common desire for 'good life'. In this sense no community ever has been (or perhaps ever can be) completely civilized; for none has ever come near to using such potentialities to the full, or has ever clearly visualized the common aim. But in all ages men have had opportunities of civilization: they have lived and worked and played in communities, exploiting some fraction of the still unexplored resources of their own minds and bodies and the world around them, goaded onward by blind instinct but also beckoned from before by the same sprite that dances before our puzzled eyes today. Wherever we find men doing or making, talking or thinking, there is civilization being made or marred. We all share the responsibility for success or failure.

<sup>1</sup> As an example of the reaction that is setting in against this mood, a young airman (quoted in *National Newsletter*, 17 August, 1944) writes: 'For the first time we begin to see civilization is not the tottering old man he has been painted.'



As civilizers we are restricted, like other craftsmen, by the limitations of our raw material—nature, especially human nature. But what is 'human nature'? It is relatively easy to describe the main characteristics of, say, 'feline nature'. A kitten is endowed from birth with certain *instincts*, in conformity with which it reacts to the presence of a dog by stiffening and bristling, to the presence of a mouse by pursuit. In contrast, a human baby is born with extremely few instincts, and these are such as seldom to determine very precisely its behaviour in any particular situation. As the child grows up, its behaviour is conditioned more and more by experience, i.e. he or she does what has been found in similar situations to give the *desired result*. The experience is partly the individual's own, partly the collective experience of the society to which he belongs—an experience embodied in the traditional customs or habits of that society and acquired by the individual member not so much through formal instruction as through unconscious imitation of his fellow members. The tendency towards imitation, or acceptance of mass suggestion, is so strong that it is sometimes described as the 'herd instinct'. In the normal adult such socially acquired habit has become a 'second nature', which determines his behaviour in normal situations as rigorously as the animal's behaviour is determined by instinct.

If we want to discover in man a primary nature, untouched by the civilizing influence of society, we must ask what determines that a particular future situation is the *desired result* of his action in the present. As often as not, the desired result is some distinction or employment that carries prestige in one society but would not be desired in another. The desire itself is thus secondary or derivative—the product of a particular civilization. But, if we look closer, we can discern certain human needs that may be classed as primary. In fulfilment of the will to live, men (like the animals) must breathe, eat and sleep, stave off excessive cold and pain, exercise their bodies and reproduce their kind. As social and rational beings, they also feel other needs almost unknown to the animals: for sympathy and affection; for a good laugh now and then; for some form of artistic self-expression, ranging from a loud noise or a loud tie to a sonata or a landscape painting; and for a certain amount of mental exercise—riddles were as popular among the Anglo-Saxons as crossword puzzles are among their descendants. No less universal, apparently, is the need to establish friendly relations with the universe: in Homer's words, 'All men have need of gods'—though we must allow for a wide interpretation of the word 'gods'. Men's senses register certain impressions and their minds work in certain ways, so that they cannot believe that fire is cold or that  $2 + 2 = 5$ . In their likes and dislikes (including their moral approval and disapproval) they differ more widely, but only within limits. This rough-and-ready analysis obviously does not cover all the elements which some might regard as ingredients of 'primary human nature'. Others, again, may think some of these traits are themselves 'secondary', products of past civilization which future civilization may modify. But it may serve provisionally as a description of our human clay, the raw material of the art of civilization.

While these primary needs impose some limit to the possible forms of human behaviour, and so of human society, they leave room for infinite variation. To some extent this variation occurs within primary human nature itself. Individuals inherit different psychological, as well as physical, peculiarities; and the physical difference between the sexes must also extend into the psychological field, though probably not so far as is commonly supposed. But, if we want to know the possible range of such innate variations, or how far they account for the different characters of adult human beings, or what latitude they leave for the development of 'secondary human nature' on quite novel lines, we cannot hope for a very precise answer.

To a great extent our actions are dictated for us not by nature but by history.

We are well aware that our choice of food or lodging or amusement is determined not only by our own 'natural' inclinations but by our position in the *economic framework* of society. This obviously cramps the freedom even of those envied few who, thanks to certain events in their own or their ancestors' history, find themselves yawning in a luxury flat instead of starving in a slum tenement. It is less obvious perhaps that, rich or poor, we are all bound still more tightly within the *cultural framework* of current fashions and beliefs. However hard we may try to 'be ourselves', we cannot help being to a great extent what others have made us. The things that seem most completely the expression of our own nature—our hobbies or holidays, our political or religious allegiances—even these have been made for us by other men almost as much as the work we do for a living or the laws we are forced to obey. But this cultural framework (which is what we generally mean when we think of civilization as a thing rather than a process) does not bind us absolutely. And the more clearly we perceive what it is, and how it came to be what it is, the less we are bound by it. We begin to see it as something that might have been utterly different—that has been utterly different and does differ immensely from class to class and from nation to nation. In all its forms it partly helps and partly hinders the fulfilment of men's primary needs, restricting their freedom here and enlarging it there, shielding them from some dangers and exposing them to others, creating secondary needs which may be a source of happiness or of unhappiness. It is artificial. It is imperfect. It is alterable.

The quest for this 'artificial' element in our make-up might be pursued in various fields—not least in daily intercourse with our fellows and reflexion on our own experience. Psychologists have built up a certain body of relevant data, but disagree widely as to its interpretation. On the whole, our best evidence is historical—'the fact that men like ourselves have in the past, perhaps in the distant past, thought or felt or acted in such and such a way'.<sup>1</sup> In this book the quest is confined to one corner of this historical field—a field potentially limitless but stringently limited in fact by human ignorance. Though the field of our inquiry is thus a distant tract of time, the thing we are looking for is something alive and present to each one of us. Our primary aim will be to understand, so far as we can, by what hard-won successes and what costly failures our predecessors on this troubled planet (thinking of themselves and not of us) built up that framework of customs and ideas which we take for granted in the world of today. In so far as this aim is achieved, the reader who is a stranger in these parts will find that he is also exploring new by-ways in his own personality—that private civilization of opinions and habits which directs his everyday actions.

Before we embark on this quest, let us give a fair hearing to an objection that lurks in many minds and is summed up in the incisive words of the great Henry Ford: 'History is bunk.' I do not know whether he meant to imply that it is largely untrue, or that, even supposing that the essential truth of the past may be ascertainable, it has no relevance to the present or the future. Both these objections are worth considering.

### *Is the Quest Possible?*

How can we tell in what ways men have 'thought and felt and acted in distant past', when we cannot even be sure how they act today, much less they think and feel? Admittedly, our knowledge of men's actions outside narrow field of our own observation is dependent on the testimony of others. But the practical man, no less than the historian, gets along quite comfortably on the assumption that (in the absence of any strong motive for deception)

<sup>1</sup>Graham Wallas: *Social Judgment* [1934], p. 40.

testimony is generally reliable. Men's thoughts and feelings are harder to read, even by the flickering light of modern psychology. And yet, without some hazy inkling of them, based on imaginative insight and sympathy, life would be impossible. We start with the assumption that other men spend their days much as we do, for the most part either in sustaining life (which includes earning their daily bread and eating it) or in enjoying life—though it is perhaps only in a capitalist society that the distinction between these two activities is fundamental. We explain their actions fairly well by the supposition that they think and feel much as we do. If they belong to our class and generation, we expect their wants and beliefs to be much the same as ours. Though experience teaches us to allow for certain differences, we never quite get rid of the sneaking feeling that So-and-So's notion of a good time (where it differs from ours) is rather silly, if not wicked, and his views about Bolshevism or the Sunday opening of cinemas are simply wrong. When we argue with him, neither of us appears to be much affected by the other's arguments. Yet, in contact with stubborn facts, people's opinions do change, and this naturally produces a change of desire and so of action. To that extent we are rational beings. But often enough, of course, our opinions are irrationally determined by our desires, and our desires by our habitual actions. The outer and the inner life are indeed so closely linked that, if we are familiar with our neighbour's habits, we could very probably give a truer account of his motives and his prejudices than we could of our own—and in most cases we certainly do.

For we talk not only to each other but about each other. As we rub shoulders with our fellows, each one of us is *making history* in a double sense: he is both causing events and reporting them. The first-hand testimonies woven into the gossip of workshop or clubroom build up that running commentary on current events that forms the raw material of the social historian. His ideal procedure would be to pick out the most revealing items in that mighty buzz of conversation, the voice of humanity throughout the ages—grumbling, squabbling, joking, singing, cursing, praying, teaching, love-making, scandal-mongering. But till quite modern times we seldom find a reporter of genius (a Herodotus, for instance) to pass these items on to us. For the most part, the talk comes filtered through many minds, warped by misunderstandings and omissions and lies. We hear only the last speaker in a game of Russian scandal. And it is not easy to get behind this 'distillation of rumour' that makes up traditional history.

Till recently, writing was an unusual and costly accomplishment, and only a few things seemed worth the trouble of reporting in this relatively enduring form. Some of these records, such as bills, receipts and I.O.U.s, were important to the writer, but interest us (if at all) for quite incidental reasons. Others, more directly addressed to posterity, though with little consideration for what posterity would want to know, took such forms as these: 'This pillar commemorates the glorious victory of Tweedledum over Tweedledee'; 'A made this cup for B'; 'X son of Y lies here'. Often the pillar and the cup themselves, and the objects buried with the dead, tell us more about the men who made or used them, though reconstructions of the past on the circumstantial evidence of inanimate things not give that sense of personal contact that comes from reading an actual message, however meagre. Most helpful for our purpose are the words of unusual men, which contemporaries preserved because they found in them their own thoughts more perfectly expressed and therefore in fact new thoughts on their way to become commonplaces.

With all these aids to exploration, we must resign ourselves, when studying history, to the role of tourists roaming through a dimly lit bazaar, peering at wares exposed for sale and picking up odd scraps of talk in a language half understood. We cannot hope to enter into intimate contact with

life of the people. But, if we keep our wits about us, we can form a fairly accurate picture of certain aspects of it. For everywhere we feel ourselves in the presence of our fellow men, and the imaginative insight that guides us in our dealings with our neighbours will serve as a guide in Egypt of the Pharaohs or Ur of the Chaldees.

*Is the Quest Worth While?*

To the second objection it is a good enough answer that this is a pleasure cruise. If it is not, we are not likely to get very far. But, besides appealing to the noble motive of curiosity, we can justify the quest on the ground of its practical purpose. We are trying to find out something about ourselves that may help us to live our own lives. In one form or another, we must all have been haunted by this insistent question: 'If the life of mankind as it is lived today is the outcome of human efforts directed by human desires, why does it fall so far short of fulfilling those desires?' This is usually regarded as a philosophical or religious, rather than an historical, question. Normally we blame either the material environment or human nature, and speak accordingly either of the 'problem of pain' or of 'the problem of sin'. Obviously there is some maladjustment in the nature of things. Besides causing us bodily pain now and then, the universe does not give us exactly what we want—or we do not want exactly what the universe gives us. We are capable of imagining and desiring some things, material or spiritual, that do not exist or are beyond our immediate reach, as men imagined flying machines thousands of years before they invented them and are still imagining the Church Universal or the Commonwealth of Man. This 'divine discontent' may be regarded as a result of that imperfect adaptation which makes man evolve more rapidly than any other species, or as the consciousness of some superhuman purpose working in and through us. It is a cause of activity rather than of suffering, and is essential to any kind of progress. We are also capable of wanting things that Nature, it seems, can never grant us: there will never be any satisfying the men who cry for the moon, or cry over spilt milk, or want to eat their cake and have it. We could not face earthly immortality. And yet, if we enjoy life, we shall never be wholly reconciled to our death; if we are capable of love, we shall never be untouched by the death of others. We are subject to certain emotions that seem inevitably to breed dissatisfaction. And there is a permanent clash between the greatest happiness of mankind and that of its component individuals—we all want more than our share. We are kindly, sociable creatures in the main, capable of great heroism and generosity. But the impartial observer must reckon also with the native greed, selfishness, laziness, spitefulness and cruelty of the human animal.

If we accept as irremediable these flaws in the raw material of human life, we must admit that the finished product will always be imperfect. But, given 'primary human nature' and non-human nature as they are, and supposing them (which is not necessarily true) to be unalterable, can it be seriously maintained that our lives today are so organized as to produce the greatest possible good? And yet the world we live in today, within the limits imposed by nature, is as men have made it; it has been built up by the free co-operation of their hands and brains. It is surely not unreasonable to hope that a study of history, of the way men have built up this setting for their lives, will shed some light on the question 'What has gone wrong?'<sup>1</sup>

It may be plausibly argued that, from the historical point of view, the root of all evil has been the desire for progress. All revolutionaries and reformers, all inventors and discoverers and legislators and philanthropists, all who have striven

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. J. Massingham: *The Heritage of Man* [1929], especially Chaps. ix and x (historical causes of degeneration and war), for a statement of the theory that the natural goodness of man has been corrupted by some more or less accidental and remediable accompaniments of civilization.

to refashion man's environment nearer to the heart's desire, only too often all these have been wrong. For the most part they have failed from want of knowledge or imagination rather than of good will. In place of some environment that was at least tolerable, since men had been painfully adapted to it through many generations, they have created a new environment, often less favourable to life as a whole and usually quite unlike the one they had aimed at. They have produced unsatisfactory compromises between conflicting ideals, or they have simply failed to foresee the consequences of their acts. From the invention of labour-saving machinery have sprung squalid towns, foul slums, diseased bodies and cramped souls, sweated labour and permanent unemployment. From attempts to repress crime and vice have arisen savage penal codes and vices more degrading than those attacked. The printing press and the radio disseminate lies as freely as truth. The aeroplane—but the aeroplane needs no Devil's advocate.

But the quest for stability has met with no better success. All conservatives, all obscurantists and die-hards, all champions of privilege and easy-going muddlers-through—all the people who said 'Oh, just let things stay as they are!' or 'Oh, just let things slide!'—all these have been wrong. Things have not stayed as they were; things have slid. Conservatives have failed to conserve, or have wasted their strength holding up awkward umbrellas after the rain has stopped. Their task has been only less futile than that of the reactionaries, whom we find in every age hoping to solve the problems of their time by restoring the conditions of some former time—the very conditions out of which these problems had arisen.

It is this interplay of unplanned or short-sighted change and blind clinging to the past that makes up the checkered pattern of men's achievements and the way they have gone wrong. We can take comfort in the reflexion with which Demosthenes encouraged the Athenians, that our troubles are of our own making. Doubtless they are not yet at an end, nor ever will be. Reformers will continue, in the face of new problems, to act with more zeal than foresight. And, though at the moment no one may wish to conserve the *status quo* exactly as it stands, there are still statesmen who think of themselves rather as guardians of an accomplished order than as guides of a living growth in which last year's new shoots will be the dead wood of some later spring. But is there any reason why we cannot face the challenge of the unknown with as clear a vision and as high a courage as any that illumine the great ages of the past? And, if we can learn in the dispassionate spirit of the scientific investigator to draw on our accumulating store of facts and our more coherent picture of the whole historical process, is it too much to hope that we can avoid some of the mistakes that cost our forbears so dear?

We cannot, of course, go back to the view of Thucydides that knowledge of past events will enable us to predict future ones, 'which in conformity with human nature will be of the same kind or not very different'. We know now that 'human nature' (in the wide sense of human behaviour in society) is immensely flexible and that, when history looks most like repeating itself, the differences are fully as significant as the resemblances. But this discovery does not justify Hegel's epigram that 'We learn nothing from the past except that we can learn nothing from the past'. One thing we certainly learn from the past is the danger of learning from it the wrong lesson, owing to a false philosophy of history or a misapprehension of vital facts. Men are, and always have been; powerfully influenced by their notions of past history, at best inaccurate and usually inspired by deliberate misrepresentation of the facts. We cannot have *no* views on history. It is a choice between truer and false views, and it would not be hard to show that a great deal of human suffering has been due to bad history and the prejudice and misunderstanding, the false optimism and misplaced ingenuity, that inevitably spring from it. What would have happened in 1939 if all mankind had derived

their picture of past events from well-informed and impartial history books? And yet, among glaring examples of history lessons mislearned, do not the last few years present some striking instances of past mistakes remembered with advantage?

In fact, though we cannot solve present problems by recalling what Gladstone said in 1867,<sup>1</sup> there is enough continuity and recurrence in history to prevent us (in the words of a modern thinker) from 'committing the ingenuous mistakes of other times'. But, as the same author proceeds to explain, the real value of historical knowledge is something different:

'We have need of history in its entirety, not to fall back into it, but to see if we can escape from it.'<sup>2</sup>

The same conclusion had been more clearly expressed by an earlier historian:

'If the Past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the Past is the safest and surest emancipation.'<sup>3</sup>

As a concrete illustration of what this means, it has been suggested that our age may hope, through the scientific study of history and even of prehistory, to reach more general agreement on the historical origins of such words as 'Christianity', 'Islam', 'patriotism', 'natural rights', and 'political liberty', and so indirectly on the validity of the underlying ideas.<sup>4</sup> The meaning of these key words of our civilization is not a matter of academic interest. They are the symbols of cherished loyalties and liberties for which we are willing to kill or to die. Yet how many of them are mere catchwords, coined long ago to symbolize the conflicting ideals of a bygone age, but now serving only to blind us to the living issues of the day! Slogans invented to draw men together now hold them apart. Dogmas that once helped to explain our experience of life now only befog us. Ancient bulwarks of liberty have become the instruments of tyranny. But these dead things still rule our lives, because the dead hand of the past lies heavy upon us, strong in its invisibility.

Today, when we are faced with the biggest reconstruction job in history, the need is greater than ever before to understand the past in order to escape from it. 'The world is weary of the past.' The generation that rebelled in its youth with unprecedented violence against traditional standards of conduct and art and time-honoured codes and institutions has passed its iconoclastic prime. The rising generation has lost interest in these discredited idols even as tyrants to rebel against. The newest of the idols, experimental science, is losing its worshippers. We know that it has added enormously to men's powers of material destruction. And many fear that it has also unleashed a destructive force in the spiritual world—that it is pulling to pieces the great creations of religious and artistic and political genius and leaving nothing in their place. They want neither to worship nor to defy the old gods, but to forget them and begin the work of creation anew. As long ago as 1874, Nietzsche (essay *On the Use and Abuse of History*) saw his contemporaries oppressed by 'the great and continually increasing weight of the past', the 'dark, invisible burden' that paralysed the will to life. He urged that the antidote lay in the *unhistorical*, 'the art of forgetting and of drawing a limited

<sup>1</sup> This catch phrase was quoted here in ignorance of the fact that what Gladstone actually said was 'What is morally wrong cannot be politically right'—a principle whose validity doubtless remains unchanged, though the general acceptance of what is 'morally wrong' has already changed considerably.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset: *The Revolt of the Masses* [English edition, 1932], pp. 100, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Acton: *Lecture on the Study of History*.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Wallas: *Social Judgement*, p. 41. Cf. also Croce's essay on *Historiography as Liberation from History* (*History as the Story of Liberty* [English edition, 1941], chap. viii) and Lord Samuel's description of 'the Science of Human Experience' (*An Unknown Land* [1942], p. 99).

horizon round one's self'. We have been privileged to see a masterpiece of this art in the repudiation of history and the glorification of myth by the Nazi régime. But the Nazi mythology is only one of the pseudo-histories of our age, not more absurd in itself than 'British Israel' or the miraculous legends that figure in the advertisements of some of our patent medicines. However carefully they may be fostered, myths can thrive only in the gap left between scientific knowledge and popular ignorance, so that part of the blame lies at the door of aloof seekers after truth who have been indifferent to public enlightenment. While the destructive criticism of historians was shattering the traditional picture of history as the working out of God's plan for humanity, more imaginative writers filled the void with pictures of their own.

There is no refuge in the *unhistorical*, any more than in the unscientific. But Nietzsche himself recognizes that, for those who can attain to it, there is an alternative way of escape, the *super-historical*, 'which turns the eyes from the process of becoming to that which gives existence its eternal and stable character, to art and religion'. Analysis is not annihilation. In pulling to pieces the fabric of our civilization to see how it works, as in splitting the atom, we cannot get away from the fact that there is something there—a reality behind the symbols, that retains its power to inspire. It is above all by studying 'the process of becoming' that we may hope to rediscover, for the guidance of our generation, the permanent element in man and his universe which must form the basis of every labour of creation.

#### *Where Do We Start From?*

Ideally, in the study of history, as of any other subject, we could not do better than start from ourselves and work outwards, which in this case means backwards. We should be following the precedent of the late Kaiser Wilhelm II, who is credited with the fruitful idea that history books should begin with himself. And theoretically it should be possible to take the main features of our own civilization as they affect the average individual and trace them back towards their historical origins. But in practice it would not be easy. Men find it hard (as Sherlock Holmes was fond of pointing out) to reason from the effect back to the cause. It seems almost impossible to tell even the simplest story backwards. And it is hard enough, even in a straightforward history, to realize that the people living at the period under review had no inkling of what was going to happen next. So it is much simpler to work towards ourselves; and strictly we ought to take as our starting-point the earliest events whose effects are still clearly manifest in our make-up.

In so doing, we shall still in a sense be starting from ourselves. It is not only that we shall not escape the compulsion to interpret history in the light of our personal experience—to start by picturing the Ancient Britons as just like the modern ones and then gradually alter the picture to fit new facts as we learn them. We shall be emphasizing the plain fact that all history is our history, the history of how we come to be the men and women we are: how we come to be drinking tea from China, or coffee from Ethiopia, or cocoa from Brazil, or beer as brewed by the Ancient Egyptians; how we come to be clothed with the wool of a sheep whose ancestors were exported from England to Australia a hundred years ago and whose remoter ancestors were tamed perhaps somewhere in Asia seven or eight thousand years before that; thinking thoughts and obeying (or disobeying) laws some of which were coined yesterday while others were crusted with antiquity in the days of Moses. The chain of causes that made us has no starting-point in historical time. Everything that touches us is linked up with the remotest past by innumerable interlacing threads. Some of these we can follow up a little way; but the whole tangled skein is far beyond any man's skill to unravel, even if the

necessary facts were ascertainable, as very few of them are. We can only grasp the broad lines of development, and if we try to follow them we soon find ourselves getting very far away from you and me and the Kaiser.

We are parted by a bare dozen of generations from the strangely remote world of the Middle Ages, and by much less than that from a way of life that modern townsmen of any nation can scarcely conceive. Today well over half the inhabitants of Britain live in large towns (with populations over 50,000); but many of them have seen their homes bitten off from the shrinking countryside. And the majority of their great-great-grandparents were born in little isolated villages with no railway (for there was no such thing in the world), no post, perhaps no school—villages where their fathers had lived before them, time out of mind, ignorant of reading and writing, knowing nothing of the world more than a few miles from their doors, spending their days tilling the earth and tending beasts, scarcely seeing anyone whose life was notably different from their own except a few craftsmen (the blacksmith, the carpenter and so on), a few stray pedlars and other wayfarers, the doctor perhaps, and of course the squire and the parson. And the life they were living had changed, in many ways, very little in the 200 generations that span recorded history. In the Egypt of the Pharaohs we find the peasant, the craftsman, the pedlar, the squire, even the doctor and the parson, in a quite recognizable guise. Even today the majority of the world's inhabitants are peasants (with their local differences of course) and the rest of us depend on their labour for our daily bread. The world of towns and factories is a mushroom growth out of that soil. It has changed, and is changing, the older world with alarming speed; but the new world cannot yet do without the old world, and it has brought the thoughts and wishes of the countryside into its new-built streets. True symbol of the industrial revolution, the unlovely but irrepressible aspidistra preserves a memory of green fields in surroundings far unlovelier than itself.

Even the peasant, the *food-producer*, has not existed for ever—less than 8,000 years perhaps, and in Britain barely half that time. Before him, and before recorded history, came the *food-gatherer*, the hunter and fisher and grubber-up of wild roots. But *his* thoughts and wishes too are still alive: his love of the chase is strong even in those who have least chance of gratifying it. In Britain today there are fishermen whose life does not differ immeasurably from his; and in some corners of the world there are peoples who have carried on in the old fashion, scarcely touched by such new-fangled inventions as agriculture and cattle-breeding.

But the great age of the food-gatherer is prehistoric. He has left little in the way of memorial. History is the record of people very like ourselves who have mostly been going quietly about this by no means easy job of minding their farms. Here and there some of the surplus food produced by them has been used to support other people, who built their houses close together in dirty smelly conglomerations called towns or cities and created what we call higher civilizations. These civilizations completely transformed the lives and thoughts of a small minority and affected even the countryfolk, for better or worse, in many ways. But they were always unstable. The civilized people were few, and their civilization depended on the exercise of a rather precarious authority over the others. Nevertheless they succeeded in exploring many hitherto unimagined potentialities of human life. The level of civilization was not consistently maintained; often it sank very low; but some elements of a higher culture always survived somewhere to be a guide and an inspiration to later explorers. And then, three or four hundred years ago, there were signs that the basis of civilization in parts of western Europe was broadening. Today it has become very broad. In many countries it has profoundly influenced the life of every person, producing a revolution comparable to the original change from food-gathering to food-production which first made civilization possible.



This new revolution is changing everything, sweeping us all off our feet. To steady ourselves, it is well to look now and then beyond the turmoil of these hustled centuries of Western civilization.<sup>1</sup> It is not only that the march of events becomes more intelligible when we take in a wider sweep of it; not only that the study of bygone ages provides a standard by which we can judge our modern world from the outside—that we can profit by seeing how the fundamental human problems were tackled by men whose experience gave them a very different standpoint from ours. The important fact is that, whatever we do, we cannot help seeing the world through the eyes of dead men, generation after generation of them. In the biological sense we inherit little of our behaviour or beliefs. But much of what we do and believe is inherited, as part of the cultural framework of our lives, from long before the dawn of history. Into whatever strange world we move in the years to come, we shall carry with us the legacy of the remotest past as a burden and a treasure. But we are not bound to it by magic bonds. Within limits, knowledge confers freedom to keep a part and throw away the rest. Before we pick and choose, before we decide which organs still have a useful function to perform and which are obsolete, we should be wise to examine as best we can the long process of growth and decay that has made the whole organism what it is. And we shall find that the early stages, so far as we can reconstruct them, are as vital a part of the whole as any that came after.

Any attempt to explore the past, on this or any quest, is a personal adventure; and any explorer, if he be but a pleasure-seeking tourist, brings back his own impressions. However observant and however honest he may be, his report will inevitably be coloured by his personal prejudices and those of his age, nation and class. If he is rash enough to publish a guide for the aid of later tourists, he will be tempted to explain much that he does not in the least understand, to oversimplify the infinitely complex, to stress trifles and to disregard many of the potent mysterious forces that are active in the human spirit and the world without. But, if he is lucky, his work (like other human achievements) may not after all be wasted.

## II

### THE IMAGINATIVE ANIMAL

#### *Evolution, Biological and Cultural*

IT is doubtful how much light will ever be shed on the nature and needs of human beings as we know them today by a study of their prehuman origins; but it may be helpful to prelude our tour by a glance into this misty region.

At the present time there are approximately 2,000 millions of them, living on the surface of a planet whose age (by a convenient coincidence) is currently estimated at something of the order of 2,000 million years. For all we know to the contrary, their descendants may still be living here 2,000 million years hence, so that we have plenty of time left for observation and experiment.

The earliest living things whose bodies have left traces in the earth's crust were smaller, simpler and less varied than the animals and plants of today. Since successive layers of the crust contain the remains of ever more diverse and complex organisms leading in a more or less orderly (though by no means unbroken) sequence to the modern forms, it is a plausible assumption that the later forms are in fact the lineal descendants of the earlier ones and that ultimately all are sprung from one or more very simple forms that 'emerged' in some still unexplained way

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bertrand Russell: *Power* [1938], p. 14. 'To understand our own time and its needs, history' both ancient and mediaeval, is indispensable, for only so can we arrive at a form of possible progress not unduly dominated by the axioms of the nineteenth century.'

from lifeless matter. The assumption is supported by the resemblances in the structure of different species; by the growth of the individual from egg to adult through stages roughly comparable to those in the supposed growth of the species; by certain peculiarities in geographical distribution (many of which, however, are still unexplained); and by the possibility of modifying certain species by selective breeding and cross-breeding so as to produce distinct forms which, if they occurred naturally, would be classed as species. Those who have examined this evidence in detail, though they admit the existence of many unsolved problems, are almost unanimous in accepting it as conclusive. The student of man today must think of him as one of many ever-changing forms of life in an ever-changing universe, though he is still free to conceive the actual course of change (in terms of human experience) as inevitable, or accidental, or purposeful (i.e. directed by some more or less conscious power towards some goal which may or may not be attained).

If we believe that man has evolved in mind as well as body from some simpler form of animal life, we can no longer regard 'primary human nature' as something ready-made and changeless. We must see the tiny span of human history as a moment in a vastly longer process. And at some stage in that process humanity must have come into being—our ancestors must have cut adrift from the brute creation. This crossing of the Great Divide, which some call the rise of man and others the Fall, may have been gradual. We can see many traits of human behaviour foreshadowed in other species—not only in the budding rationality of the higher apes but in such things as the bower bird's collection of shiny objects, the rhythmic dances of the crane or the wolf pack's choral hymns to the full moon. Yet with humanity there does appear something essentially new, for which perhaps the best word is 'imagination'. Men have lost direct touch with Nature. Instead of responding instinctively to things as they are, with the unquestioning realism of the unselfconscious animal, men have the child's gift of make-believe: they interpose between themselves and the world perceived by the senses a world of fantasy. At first this may have been largely a world of visual symbols or even smells—an elaboration of the sort of world even animals may make for themselves; but with the growth of articulate speech it has become mainly a world of sound-symbols or words. In this world men can put together things not conjoined in Nature; in speech, as in painting, they can 'picture' things that have never happened and perhaps could never happen. And, because they can 'see the world as it is not', they have become free from the direct compulsion of the world as it is—free to choose between imaginings, to distinguish between good and evil.<sup>1</sup> They have grown dissatisfied with the actual and anxious to tinker at it to suit their own convenience. They have become, in fact, the restless, fanciful beings we encounter in every page of history, and even in those fragmentary opening chapters which we rank as prehistoric.

For the Great Divide lies outside our picture. However strangely men may have evolved in the remote past and whatever miraculous transformations they may undergo in the remote future, we are not entitled to drag in evolution to explain the changes in man's way of life in historical time. Even assuming that the normal processes of biological evolution operate in human societies, where the conditions of survival (by non-human standards) are anything but normal, these processes work so slowly that it is questionable whether the 150 or 200 generations of recorded history have brought about any appreciable change in man's innate abilities, as it is plain that they have not substantially altered his bodily appearance. In the future, increasing knowledge may enable us to guide and speed up biological change by selective breeding. But in the historical past any such change

<sup>1</sup> This corresponds to the process by which many activities that are performed by even the highest animals through reflex mechanisms have been transferred in man to the discriminating control of the 'roof-brain'.

in the species, if it has occurred, has been completely overshadowed by the effects produced on individuals after birth by changes in the 'cultural framework' of their lives. If we choose to describe the sum of these changes as social or cultural evolution, we must beware of confusing this with biological evolution. The two types of 'evolution' not only operate on wholly different time scales, but their modes of operation are so distinct that it is never safe to argue from one to the other. Both, however, involve Variation and Selection. Consequently, there are certain respects in which biological evolution can be fruitfully compared with the far speedier development and diffusion of civilization, though the comparison may easily be pushed too far.

Evolution in either sense is not a natural law of inevitable progress. It is a process of adaptation (whether purposeful or random); and some types of adaptation, such as that of a parasite to its host, involve decay and loss of organs, reversing what we regard as the normal course of evolutionary change. If a species is well adapted to its environment and the environment does not appreciably change, the species may evolve very slowly. Limpets, for instance, have stuck to their rocks with little visible change since the Silurian Age, perhaps 300 million years ago, when the evolution of Vertebrates had barely begun. But suppose a species has become adapted to a warm climate and the climate becomes colder; it must either readapt itself, migrate or perish. In a period of frequent changes and perils, only the most adaptable can survive. If ever they are brought into contact with other creatures that have lived through many generations in more tranquil surroundings, they will have a tremendous pull. Australia, for instance, since the early days of Mammalian life, has escaped many of the ups and downs of the other continents, and as it was mainly isolated its plants and animals did not have to face the cut-throat competition of rivals toughened by adaptation to these vicissitudes. Such evolution as there was might be called degeneration rather than progress: the emu, in the safe seclusion of its island continent, lost the use of its wings. Hence the old-fashioned Australian fauna cannot compete with the dog and the rabbit, and the native flora has failed to resist a mass-invasion of foreign weeds. This is obviously parallel to the law of 'cultural evolution' by which the earliest human immigrants into Australia, a few thousand years ago, stagnated like the Marsupial mammals.

The 'survival of the fittest', then, means the survival of the more adaptable and sensitive, and those that have been brought to a higher pitch of efficiency by facing a wider range of experiences. It may mean the survival of groups whose individual members have learnt to subordinate personal survival to the welfare of the herd. But the more elaborate and responsive organisms, which evolve more rapidly, run proportionately greater risks of extinction. This is comparable to the action of 'artificial selection' on the 'evolution' of man-made articles: certain classes of vehicle (e.g. the wheelbarrow) serve their simple purpose adequately and have survived with little change from century to century, whereas among such specialized products of cultural evolution as the automobile the struggle for existence is intense.

### *Man and Subman*

During the period known to geologists as the *Pleistocene* ('Most Recent'), the half million years or so that preceded the beginnings of recorded history, there were no such earth-shaking catastrophes as had built and shattered continents in earlier eras. In most parts of the earth, however, there were changes sufficient to make great demands on the adaptability of its more highly specialized inhabitants. We find evidence of striking fluctuations in temperature, possibly due to cyclic changes in the sun. At least three times a great part of Europe, northern Asia and North America was buried under an ice sheet such as now covers the

Antarctic continent; at these times the climate of more southerly regions such as the Sahara Desert was temperate and moist. In the intervals of these glacial epochs Europe was sometimes warmer than it is today. Associated in some still undetermined way with these fluctuations there were changes in sea level that sufficed more than once to submerge large parts of the British Isles and at other times to lay bare the bed of the North Sea and possibly to leave land bridges across the Mediterranean.

Throughout the *Pleistocene*, and perhaps through some part at least of the preceding *Pliocene*, the Old World (the land mass of Europe, Asia and Africa) was inhabited by a group of beings that differed from all other known forms of life by their habit of making tools of flint and similar stones (and also, no doubt, of other, less durable, material). About these tools we know a good deal. Having rediscovered something of the art of flaking flint, experts are learning to distinguish 'artefacts' from stones shaped by natural agencies and to recognize the products of different 'industries'. They have traced the amazingly slow development of these various techniques, the local evolution of more specialized tools and the mixture of industries resulting from the contacts of different schools of craftsmen. Tools from the *Early Pleistocene* are simply lumps (nodules) of flint slightly flaked so as to give a rough cutting edge. Later, in the *Middle Pleistocene*, we can distinguish two main series of cultures. The typical tool of one series is a knife or scraper made of a flake knocked off from a flint nodule and apparently used by hunters for cutting up game and treating skins. In the other series, though scrapers are not unknown, the typical tool is the so-called 'hand-axe', made out of the core of a nodule from which flakes have been knocked off; it has been suggested that it was used for digging up roots. The focus of the Flake Culture was more northerly, possibly in Europe, while the Hand-axe Culture may have originated in Africa; but in the course of the climatic fluctuations the authors of the two cultures seem to have migrated far into each other's territories.

Concerning the makers of these tools we know very much less, their bodies being more perishable than flint. There is enough evidence, however, to show that they were creatures resembling man in many ways but distinguished by certain features which they share with the *anthropoid* ('man-like') apes. Skulls and other bones of such ape-like men, dating from the *Early Pleistocene*, have been found in a cave near Peking (where they were associated with roughly worked flints), and also in Java, Germany (near Heidelberg), England (Piltdown in Sussex and Swanscombe in Kent) and Africa (Kanam in Kenya and Broken Hill in Rhodesia, though the geological age of these two is questioned). During the *Middle Pleistocene*, parts of Europe and Asia (including Palestine) were inhabited by various races collectively known as Neandertal Man, a creature with the stooping gait, heavy brow-ridges, protruding jaws and receding chin and forehead of the subman, but a cunning craftsman in flint for all that, since he was apparently the main author of the Flake Culture. Most experts suppose that all these represent species that have since become extinct, though the Kanam subman has been claimed as a direct ancestor of man and the Swanscombe skull is said to be remarkably human. Others favour an alternative theory of convergent evolution, according to which these very diverse forms have undergone a series of modifications tending in the same direction (notably towards increased brain capacity) so as to result in the several races of modern man.

The submen, of course, really lie outside the range of human history; their brains were very different from ours and we can never hope to understand what went on inside them. And yet, from the skull-form of the Java subman it has been inferred that the area of the brain dealing with spoken language was already well developed. His cousins at Peking apparently used fire, though probably (like the Andamanese Pygmies) they did not know how to make it. Neandertal Man

buried his dead with a care which suggests that he may have had some hazy notion of individual life prolonged beyond the grave. All these things betoken an active, imaginative mind, already freed from the bondage of instinct and beginning to grope in the world of fantasy. So perhaps, if we could meet one of these our great-uncles in the flesh, we should find that we had points of contact with him. It is not inconceivable, even apart from the possibility of convergent evolution, that there was some intermarriage between them, or intermediate races, and our own ancestors. Individuals quaintly reminiscent of the Neandertaler crop up even today, and there may well be a drop or two of his blood in our veins (or, to speak more scientifically, a few of his genes in our cells).

It has sometimes been supposed that the species *Homo sapiens*, to which all present-day men are assigned, appeared quite suddenly in the *Late Pleistocene*, on the verge of the period which geologists call *Recent*—say 20,000 to 30,000 years ago—and spread rapidly over the globe, exterminating the subhuman races. It seems likely, however, that the world-wide distribution of 'true men' began much earlier than this. Some authentically human remains from East Africa (Kanjera near Kanam) are apparently of *Middle Pleistocene* date and associated with an early form of the Hand-axe Culture, which may thus have been the typical culture of our species in contrast to the contemporary Flake Culture of the Neandertalers.

If our ancestors had evolved by this early date a bodily form scarcely distinguishable from ours, they may already have possessed the essential traits of 'primary human nature'. But they can have had little chance of developing their distinctively human powers. Because they were adaptable and cunning and probably almost omnivorous, they were able to survive in the struggle for existence and gradually to extend their range over most of the mainland of the Old World. But they can never have been very numerous (it has even been estimated that the world would not support a population of more than about 5,000,000 such ill equipped food-gatherers) and their rudimentary weapons can scarcely have enabled them to compete on equal terms with cave bear and sabre-toothed tiger.

It was in the closing phase of the Pleistocene, conveniently described as the *Reindeer Age*, when Europe still lay in the grip of the last Ice Age (to date), that *Homo sapiens* began to enter into his heritage as lord of creation. The submen had died out, or had been exterminated or absorbed. The bleak and wind-swept grasslands stretching south of the great ice-cap from southern England to the Danube valley were stocked with a multitude of grazing animals—reindeer, musk ox, mammoth, horse—which provided food for various races of human beings. The predominant cultures were of a type apparently developed by heirs of the Hand-axe tradition through contact with the Flake school. This type, with many local variations, can be traced right across Europe and also eastward as far as Palestine and some way south into Africa. It continued to develop and ramify over a period of some thousands of years, culminating perhaps about 10,000 B.C., after which men were obliged to change their way of life more radically in response to a decisive change of climate. The authors of these cultures reveal their humanity not only by their skeletal remains and the products of their craftsmanship, much superior in technique to anything that had gone before, but also by a remarkable series of paintings and sculptures, which we shall consider later as our earliest witness to the workings of the human mind.

Our scanty evidence does not demonstrate how the various cultures were related to the different racial types of the age, or how these in turn were related to the different races of modern man. We know that certain practitioners of very diverse cultures were big-brained, broad-faced giants of the so-called *Crô-Magnon* race. It is highly probable that this is one ingredient of the population of modern Europe. It may also have been akin to the prehistoric Boskop race of South

Africa and so (strangely enough) to the stunted Bushman race of today, which strengthens the possibility that the Bushman paintings of South Africa (some of them only a century or two old) preserved the traditions of prehistoric European art.<sup>1</sup> Other racial types, however, certainly co-existed with the Crô-Magnon type in Europe, notably a long-skulled race best known from the Czech province of Moravia. Towards the close of the period we have good evidence of racial mixture, e.g. a tomb at Ofnet (Bavaria) which contained 33 skulls varying greatly in form. Even at this early date we find little support for the theory, which has assumed such dangerous importance in our times, that distinctive cultures are created by distinct races. While it would be rash to dogmatize one way or the other on this highly controversial subject, it will be worth our while, at this stage, to clear away a few misconceptions which are liable to confuse our quest.

### *The Problem of Race*

All the geographical varieties or races into which mankind may be classified are held to constitute a single species, on the ground that any two of them can interbreed and produce fertile offspring (though the species, like the atom, of modern science has become such an intricate concept that this does not get us very far). The fact remains that a Negro from the Gold Coast and an Eskimo from Greenland differ from each other in a number of obvious peculiarities; and it is a fair assumption that the former is the offspring of many generations of Negroes, and the latter of Eskimoes. The assumption is based, not on actual knowledge of their pedigrees, but on their physical features and their geographical distribution. When we attempt on this basis to classify the whole of mankind, we soon get into difficulties.

The simplest classification distinguishes a primitive stock, supposed to have survived with little modification in the Australian Aborigines, and three sharply differentiated branches, the Black (Negroid), Yellow (Mongoloid) and White (Europoid). Apart from skin-colour, the European (like the Australian) has hairs that are elliptical in section and therefore slightly curled or 'wavy'; Mongoloid hairs are cylindrical and straight, Negroid hairs flattened and frizzy. These races may be subdivided according to other characteristics. For instance, a statistical survey of Europe suggests that a short, brunette, long-skulled sub-race ('Mediterranean') is separated from a tall, blond, long-skulled sub-race ('Nordic') by a wedge of 'Alpines', intermediate in stature and complexion but round-skulled, which extends along the upland belt from Iran to central France, the population of Britain being predominantly Nordic in the East and Mediterranean in the West, with a small Alpine element. Distinctions between these sub-races, however, are simply a matter of averages. Though each area, generally speaking, has its own dominant racial type, racially 'pure' individuals are almost everywhere in a minority. In Europe bigger differences are found between individuals within almost any country than between the average types of the different countries.

Theoretically, we could explain the present distribution of human types by assuming that they are due to intermixture of a certain number of 'pure races' that originated in isolation, presumably during the Late or Middle Pleistocene. On this hypothesis we should look for the cradle of the Negroid race in West Africa (though this leaves it a mystery how they got into Papua and perhaps Tasmania). Similarly the Mongoloids may have evolved in China, whence an offshoot could have migrated via Bering Strait to populate America. The Australian Aborigines are apparently immigrants from south-east Asia: there are traces of prehistoric Australoids in Java, and such primitive remnants as the Veddas

<sup>1</sup> A connecting link in space, and probably in time, is afforded by the rock paintings of the Sahara and of East Africa, where traces of Bushman culture and language still survive.

of Ceylon may be assigned to the same race. Finally, the European type must have originated somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Mediterranean, though this makes it difficult to account for the Europoid traits of the Hairy Ainu of Japan. It may be supposed that these 'pure races' originated either from different species of submen (by convergent evolution) or as geographical varieties of *Homo sapiens* adapted to different environments.

One obvious criticism of this theory is that the assumption of four major races, neither more nor less, is quite arbitrary. Are we to carry the argument further, and assume that the peoples of modern Europe are a mixture of three 'pure' sub-races, who also originated in isolation? But, again, why three sub-races only? And how does this square with the evidence we have already noticed of early man in Europe, which one expert has summarized thus:

'There is no evidence from any part of the world to demonstrate that populations have ever existed which were markedly less variable than those of Europe today. . . . It is possible that "pure races" have never existed except in the imaginations of some anthropologists.' (G. M. Morant: *The Races of Central Europe* [1939], pp. 63, 67.)

Is it then more correct to think of the present variegated pattern of human types as the product not so much of convergence and intermixture as of divergence and separating out? This theory implies that men today are evolving along several different roads (some of them, perhaps, blind alleys) from a relatively unspecialized type, possibly resembling the population of India, which is generally regarded as an amalgam of all the major races. The germ-cells of this primitive human stock must have contained the potentiality of widely divergent developments—towards the fair complexion and blue eyes of the Nordic or the heat-resisting skin and protruding, heat-dispersing lips of the Negro—a potentiality ready to be actualized in the course of generations wherever conditions were favourable. Similar 'racial' types could thus emerge independently in various parts of the world. We could then explain, without postulating extensive migrations, the Negroid Papuan and the Europoid Ainu and the sporadic distribution of those puzzling little people the Pygmies (Bushmen of the South African deserts, Négrilloes of the central African forests and Negritos of Malaya and some adjacent islands). And we should have to look for 'pure races' not in the past but in the future.

Doubtless both these theories oversimplify the facts. Man is a uniquely variable and unstable species, and human groups may always have included individuals differing widely from the average of the group. Here and there, in exceptionally isolated regions, relatively pure races may have arisen. Some may have died out altogether, but most would tend, like the Crô-Magnon type, to be reabsorbed into the common stock. Despite the factors making for diversity, migration and interbreeding have always sufficed to maintain the solidarity of the human species.

It is reasonable to suppose that racial difference, however we define it, has played some part in the development of different civilizations. In the present state of knowledge, however, we can do little more than note it as one of the many unknown quantities, noting also that there are sound historical reasons for doubting whether it is after all a very big quantity. We may contrast the Hindus, for instance, who have retained many features of their ancient civilization despite the continual influx of new populations, with the Japanese, who have twice remodelled their civilization (copying first the Chinese model, then the European) while remaining practically immune from immigration. The men and women who have created and sustained distinctive civilizations have been united not by their

racial origins (which have generally been much more diverse than they supposed), but by community of culture. They may have practised different arts and crafts, but they exchanged and mutually imitated the products of their skill. They may have thought and spoken in different languages, but original thoughts expressed in one form of speech found their way into others readily enough to maintain a general commerce of ideas. Their various sects may have persecuted one another, but they shared a fundamentally similar outlook on the universe. They may have been induced by sectional interests and national or personal loyalties to fight one another, but even in their wars they appealed to common traditions and standards transcending any political (and still more any racial) frontier.

This is not to say that the physical differences between races are never accompanied by mental differences. There is evidence that the average Australoid brain is smaller and less specialized than the average Europoid or Mongoloid brain, though for that very reason it may have retained certain potentialities of development which the others have sacrificed. In intelligence tests (devised by Europeans?) in California, children of Europeans have averaged a higher score than young Negroes or native Indians, and a shade lower than Chinese and Japanese. It seems, however, that Negroes from progressive states excel Europeans from relatively backward ones. Other American tests have suggested that representatives of supposedly 'pure' races are less intelligent than men of mixed race—the 'pure Nordic' coming especially low in the scale. Racial mixture certainly seems at times to have stimulated civilization, but such stimulus may in fact have been due to cross-fertilization of cultures rather than of races. It is not unlikely that Negroes are by nature more musical and more sociable than other races, Mediterraneans more rational, Nordics more masterful—but such generalizations are always open to suspicion. In sense perception and primary mental reactions—in almost all that we have included under 'primary human nature'—little evidence has been found of significant racial differences.<sup>1</sup> The same rules of logic appear to be valid for all sane human minds. Civilized men differ from savages chiefly by their greater power of concentration—at least on those subjects in which their interest has been aroused by experience or education. There is thus no known barrier between the minds of men of different races as such; the very real barrier between the minds of, for instance, an English and a Chinese adult is historical, the result of very different upbringings in two widely separated worlds of ideas and customs.

We are justified, therefore, in approaching prehistoric art, or such other clues as we can find to the life and thought of our uncivilized forbears, with some hope of comprehension. There is no need to invent a 'primitive mind' constitutionally different from ours. If the cave artist had been born into modern society and subjected to its cultural influences, he might have responded to them much as we do. Conversely, there is little reason to suppose that a modern civilized man, transported in infancy to an encampment of his ancestors of 500 generations ago, would grow up very different in behaviour from his fellow-tribesmen who had not yet embarked on the perilous adventure of civilization.

<sup>1</sup> Apparent differences have been observed in minor points, such as sensitivity to particular colours and the frequency of colour-blindness.



## III

## FOOD-GATHERERS/

*The Evidence*

WE begin our quest for civilization in a quarter where the finished product is obviously not to be found, but with some hope of detecting the raw material unspoilt by bungling. At the back of our minds elusive visions of the Golden Age or the Garden of Eden blend incongruously with Thomas Hobbes' 'state of nature', in which life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. The known facts provided by the material remains of early man are in themselves few and meagre. Their interpreter must rely principally on three guides of questionable value.

First, as always, he must start from himself, by looking for the savage in his own make-up. When he has stripped off the layer of mental habits deposited by modern science and the deeper layer deposited by traditional religion, he will probably find certain oddities that cannot be reconciled with either—an attachment to some absurd mascot or some lucky day, a fear of ghosts or the dark, a sense of uneasiness when someone says 'Well, nothing's gone wrong so far.' If he casts his mind back to his childhood, he will have some inkling of a life more nearly dominated by such odd faiths and fears, attached to particular objects or places and not co-ordinated with any picture of the world as a whole. But, in this age of carefully propagated myths and slogans, he would be rash to brand all superstitions as 'survivals' from the childhood of the race; some may be no older than the prejudice against lighting three cigarettes with one match, which is said to have sprung from a justifiable respect for the Boer sniper. Here, as often, superstition is not the parent of rational thought but its wayward child. And in general, while the child of civilized parents often seems to be reproducing primitive mythology and even art, his recapitulation of the growth of the human mind is certainly no more accurate than the embryo's recapitulation of earlier stages of human evolution. What child psychology reveals is not an ancestral memory but certain aspects of 'primary human nature' which our civilization tends to suppress.

At the other end of the scale, the behaviour of the higher animals may be used as a check. If this cannot be relied on to tell us anything positive about man, at least it knocks the bottom out of theories that depict our human ancestors living on an intellectual and social level lower than that actually reached by apes or elephants.

Lastly, there is the evidence of the less civilized communities subsisting at the present day. The pioneer prehistorians of last century tended to assume that all peoples were climbing at different rates up the same evolutionary ladder, so that civilized nations could find in their 'backward' brethren a true picture of 'the base degrees by which they did ascend'. There are good reasons for questioning this assumption, notably the fact of Diffusion of Culture.<sup>1</sup> It is obviously not easy to find a savage tribe, however isolated, that has not been profoundly affected by the spread of European civilization during the last two or three centuries. And the tendency of civilization to spread is not a new one. Most of the arts of the modern savage—his rudimentary agriculture, his methods of making and using tools and weapons, huts, boats, pottery, clothing, musical instruments,

<sup>1</sup> The case for Diffusion *versus* Evolution has been popularized in an extreme form by Sir Grafton Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry, more convincingly by Lord Raglan (*How came Civilization?*). Most anthropologists, in the absence of direct historical evidence, prefer to explain cultural resemblances by the postulate that 'in a general way the reactions of all men in similar circumstances are alike. (J. T. Shotwell: *The History of History* [1939], p. 40.)

etc.—bear unmistakable traces of borrowing from tribe to tribe, and many may have originated as more or less crude imitations of the work of more creative communities. Some of these arts, and the less tangible elements of culture associated with them, may have been 'evolved' independently by several communities. Though the process of cultural evolution is not governed by any known Law of Nature, certain sequences seem to be natural (much as it is natural for reptiles or mammals, if they wish to make a success of life in the water, to develop fish-like bodies). There is no law of nature that compels men to grow grain; but, once they begin to do so, they will naturally require receptacles of some material to store it in, and they are limited to a few possible materials—stone, woodwork, basketry, clay, skin, or woven fibre—each of which can be treated in only a limited number of ways. Broad resemblances of technique may be due to such natural sequences, but resemblances involving many points of detail can more plausibly be taken as evidence of Diffusion. When we recognize that such diffusion has been going on in ever-widening and overlapping circles since the first dawn of civilization, we begin to wonder whether the inhabitants of a South Sea Island or an African kraal can show us anything more genuinely native and primitive than their cast-off European clothing or their garbled recollection of missionary sermons.

There are, it is true, a few stray remnants of food-gathering peoples who seem to be almost untouched by any material elements of a higher civilization: the Australoid and Pygmy tribes and the Eskimoes and Fuegians of the extreme north and south of America, when they have become extinct (as most of them seem likely to do before long), will leave material remains not unlike those left by early man in Europe. But even here we cannot jump straight to the conclusion that their ways of life and their attitude to it must needs be genuine survivals. They may all have been affected more subtly and intimately than appears by contact with their more civilized neighbours: even the isolated Australians show evidence of contact at least with the Papuans, who have long been in touch with peoples culturally linked to eastern Asia. Again, the reason why most of these 'primitive' food-gatherers have survived at all is that they have adapted their habits to life in inhospitable regions which did not tempt more advanced communities—the very places that prehistoric man would have avoided. Others, such as the Australians, whose survival was due rather to isolation, may have shed certain superfluous attainments as the emu has shed its wings. It is even possible (though it certainly cannot be proved) that the ancestors of all these 'backward' peoples, at an early stage in man's development, got drawn into a blind alley—that their minds underwent some adaptation which has made them permanently uncivilizable. But can we call them 'backward', merely because they have not travelled along the road our forbears chose? Should we not rather judge that the Australians, with their intricate tangle of social institutions, had made good progress along their own line of cultural evolution? And what human achievement can confidently be rated higher than the mastery over a seemingly impossible environment won by the 'uncivilized' Eskimoes?

To complicate the problem further, many who have written about 'savages' and their ways have arrived at sweeping generalizations by tearing the diverse institutions of different peoples from their social context and lumping them together under such labels as 'totemism' or 'matriarchy'. Others have put too much reliance on the biased judgment of traders and settlers, who have never seen the 'native' in his natural tribal setting, or on the strictures of sometimes unimaginative missionaries, or even on the fairy-tales of too imaginative travellers. But the well attested descriptions of native life and thought even within the limits of Australia, to look no further afield, present a baffling diversity that almost precludes any general conclusions. If we take the modern 'primitives'

as our guides, we may still emerge from a tour of prehistory with our prejudices as unshaken as if we had been visiting Soviet Russia.

### *Livelihood*

Chastened by this preliminary douche of scepticism, but not unduly restraining our human prerogative of imagination, let us turn again to western Europe in the Reindeer Age (say 10,000 or 15,000 years ago), when it was peopled by human communities as far advanced, to the best of our present knowledge, as any then living in any part of the world. Certain facts about the material circumstances in which these folk lived are well established. From what is known about present-day food-gathering peoples, we can at least picture how men may have lived in these circumstances. This provisional picture is not only the best we can fashion with the materials at our command; it is also, as we shall find, a background against which we can present in an intelligible form many otherwise puzzling features of subsequent history.

For the setting of our scene we may choose some corner of southern England or France and try to think away all evidences of man's handiwork—not only buildings but the more lasting changes wrought by drainage, pasturage and every kind of agricultural operation. The climate is still colder than what we are used to, and also drier; otherwise we should find the whole country densely wooded—you can cut down a tree with a stone axe, but you can't cut down a forest. The wild life is not altogether strange, but we are struck by an abundance of big game worthy of the South African veldt. And here, in a sheltered nook by a streamside, is a settlement of human beings, wild, unkempt creatures, but sturdy and well built. They are decorated with tattoo marks or cicatrices, doubtless rich in symbolic significance, and with necklaces of cowrie shells and other ornaments—or perhaps rather amulets—such as are often found buried with the dead. They may be clad in skins, though drawings suggest that these were worn only on solemn occasions, and some Australians and other modern savages have never hit on this method of keeping warm. There are no caves in this part of the country, and hut-building is unknown. Besides, hunters cannot easily settle in villages; they must be free to follow their prey. We may find skin tents, like the North American teepees, but probably there will be nothing more ambitious than the rough shelters or windbreaks of the Bushmen and Australians. The women are roasting mammoth flesh on spits over a fire; the children playing noisily; the men resting after the day's hunt. But a careful watch is being kept, and at sight of us they jump up and seize their spears. The flint spear-heads look uncomfortably sharp, and we can only hope that this particular tribe is not at feud with all its neighbours, or our visit will soon be cut short. We shall probably find our hosts timid and suspicious; but perhaps (like the Eskimoes) they are at peace with mankind and ready to welcome any stranger. If we can once win their confidence, we may be able to count on the widely recognized obligation of hospitality (which, however, for obvious reasons is commonly limited to a day or two). With luck, we may even be admitted to blood-brotherhood with the tribesmen and allowed to share in their activities.

We shall soon find that the simple life of the food-gatherer is exceedingly complicated. The menu indeed is simple, not to say monotonous, and ill balanced.<sup>1</sup> Besides the staple meat food, there is little but a few indigestible roots, bitter herbs such as sorrel and dandelion, haws and crab-apples in season and such tasty morsels as snails and beetles. The collection of these extras, which will fall largely

<sup>1</sup> 'At one period in Switzerland the diet was 90 per cent. cave bear, in Moravia 90 per cent. mammoth and in Denmark 90 per cent. shellfish.' (J. W. N. Sullivan: *Limitations of Science* (Pelican edition), p. 130.)

on the women, will become important only when game is scarce. Some days we shall gorge; others we shall starve. Meat will not keep, unless there is natural cold storage available, as there is for the Eskimoes; and in any case most observers agree that the savage, like the child and the animal, lives in the moment and takes no thought for the morrow. In normal times, however, this diet, aided by rigorous natural selection, will be adequate to maintain physical fitness. The evidence of chronic malnutrition and disease among many savages applies in the main to tribes that have passed out of the hunting stage.

To earn our daily meat, we shall have to devote many arduous hours, day after day, to tracking down an elusive and possibly dangerous quarry over miles of broken country. We have no bows and arrows or domesticated dogs: these aids to hunting were known to prehistoric peoples of North Africa and Spain, but probably not till fairly late in the period we are considering. We no doubt use pitfalls, such as that which caught the trapped mammoth portrayed by one cave artist; with our tools of stone or wood and bone they must take a lot of digging. Also we have spears, clubs and firebrands. Of course we shall not tackle such big game as mammoth single-handed, and in hunting such fleet-footed creatures as reindeer we shall have to spread out in a large circle and gradually close in on our prey. This means that our tribe must be of considerable size, say fifty families, though probably when food is scarce it will tend to break up into smaller family units. The tribal unit of modern hunting peoples rarely exceeds about 500 persons; among the Veddas of Ceylon, who probably represent a decadent society, it may drop to a score. Individual members of the tribe have greater physical strength or skill than others, and such will naturally be accepted as leaders and enjoy some authority. The older men, too, will be useful repositories of knowledge. But the lowlier hunting peoples rarely have 'chiefs', and their leaders do not readily develop into hereditary kings. There are virtually no class distinctions. There is no surplus of food to support a leisured class, and few specialized arts. At the lowest cultural levels, even the specialist in magic has not acquired professional status. Certain individuals will doubtless have become acknowledged experts in the making of flint tools, having more than their share of that magical power which we call talent or knack. But, for one who has mastered the established technique of his tribe, the manufacture of a rough spear-head of flint requires no exceptional ability: an Australian, with a well directed stone, can knock down an insulator from a telegraph pole and chip it into a handy weapon in a few minutes. So, generally speaking, there are no indispensable specialists; everybody at a pinch can make and do everything necessary for himself. The family unit is practically self-supporting.

### *Language and Thought*

After a spell of this exacting, stimulating, but rather limited, hand-to-mouth existence, we may expect to have made some headway in learning the language of our hosts. We shall not find it easy. The native languages of primitive peoples bear no resemblance to the simplified palavers or pidgin languages sometimes used in intercourse between them and foreigners. They generally have a complex grammatical structure and a large vocabulary full of subtle nuances. Their speakers mostly learn civilized languages much more easily than we learn theirs. An extreme instance is afforded by the Yahgans of Tierra del Fuego: while their way of life is every bit as primitive as that we have been describing, they have a vocabulary of over 30,000 words, far more than are used in conversational English. These include, of course, many synonyms; but their abundance is due primarily to the combination in one word of many details that we should either omit or express by separate words. The stock example is the word *mamihlapinatapai*, for which even the most civilized communities might find a use: it is said to mean

'to look at each other hoping that either will do something which both parties desire but are unwilling to do'.<sup>1</sup>

With a superfluity of words denoting particular situations or highly specialized objects, there goes a dearth of general terms. One North American tribe, who have special words for 'eating meat', 'eating fruit' and so on, have apparently never been struck by the notion that a man can just 'eat' without eating anything in particular. Even in civilized English, when biologists wanted a word to include the taking of solid and liquid nourishment, they had to invent the new term 'ingest'. It is largely by the invention of such general terms, together with the opposite process of more precise analysis, that men have enlarged their powers of expression. They have been continually regrouping or *classifying* their experiences. Sometimes they seem to have classified with very little method: the Bantu peoples of Africa, for instance, group their nouns in classes roughly corresponding to genders but based not on sex but on size or some other attribute that baffles definition. Gradually men have sorted out their ideas, or have learnt to analyse their experience in ways that help to satisfy their wants, whether material or spiritual. From concrete individual notions like 'my father', 'your father', 'young father', 'old father', 'father of a boy', 'father of a girl', they have proceeded by abstraction to such convenient general concepts as 'father' or 'fatherhood'. At the same time they have restricted the meaning to 'male parent' from wider usages which included 'father's brother' or 'mother's brother' or some other class, according to the social structure of the tribe. Similarly, in place of inflected verb forms in which subject and object and such attendant circumstances as time, place and mode were implicit, they have tended more and more to express these ideas separately and so more distinctly and in a way that allows greater freedom to omit irrelevancies or recombine ideas. European languages have become steadily more *analytic* in this way, though they still fall far short of Chinese and related languages (some of them relatively barbarous in other ways). But we must also reckon with the opposite process: for instance, while the Classical Latin *amabo* ('I shall love') was replaced in Popular Latin by the analytic expression *ego amare habeo*, this has become in French what is virtually the single word *j'aimerai*.<sup>2</sup>

Since this classifying process, both in vocabulary and in grammar, seems to have been working in two opposite directions, it is not easy to follow it backwards so as to arrive at some notion of the earliest languages (which were probably created by subhuman communities). We may guess that they included some very general expressions of emotion (alarm, anger, affection), such as are recognizable in the cries of animals and survive into civilized speech as expletives, interjections or endearments not fully incorporated in the structure of the language. At the other end of the scale there must have been names, or nicknames, for individual persons or objects, which came to be applied to whole classes or to associated ideas by those 'figures of speech' still familiar in poetry and less obviously underlying prose usage. Normally we express abstract ideas by the figurative employment of terms that originated with a more concrete significance (or, to give these words their older meanings, 'By-the-measuring-rod we squeeze-out dragged-away shapes by the potter-like in-folding of boundary-stones that gushed-forth with a more grown-together sign-making'). The driving force behind the growth of language has been men's desire to impart their experiences and their wishes precisely but without irrelevant detail. Forms of speech best fitted to achieve this object have had the best chance of survival. But no language has progressed steadily in this direction, and clear expression of thought in any language remains a difficult art. Despite the obvious advantages of calling a spade, we often

<sup>1</sup> R. R. Marett: *Anthropology*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Amabo* itself originated as a compound with an auxiliary verb related to Latin *fui*, English *be*.



*Photographs by G. Biv.*

ART OF THE CAVE MAN carvings of bison from the Dordogne



[Macmillan]

CAVE MAN AT HOME morning in a Vedda rock shelter



[Macmillan]

PRIMITIVE SCIENCE determining the sowing season in Borneo

prefer to call it by some other name because this is easier to pronounce, or more respectable, or more picturesque, or more humorous, or because we wish to mislead, or to appeal to prejudice, or to avoid some unlucky association, or simply because we have forgotten the usual name. So we have built up our languages, like our other institutions, by confused efforts perpetually side-tracked but often achieving subsidiary effects that have proved unexpectedly valuable.

Clearly, speech must always have been a communal activity: one man did not invent a language and then explain it to his fellows. We may picture it taking shape, with a wealth of illustrative gesture and intonation, during tribal dances and sing-songs and other combined operations, beginning with something like the *yo ho* choruses of sea shanties, sung by men hauling together on one rope. The strong, silent man is a product of civilization; to the uncivilized it comes as naturally as to children or to monkeys to chatter all the time without worrying much about the sense, and to express their emotions by howling in unison. Particular tribal howls would come to be appropriated by custom to particular occasions, and so acquire a fixed meaning. Sometimes, perhaps, a complex howl was analysed into a series of sounds associated with particular objects or actions.

The limits of language also fix the limits of thought; it is difficult to grasp any idea for which our language does not afford a ready means of expression. We can force our thought a little ahead of speech, or mental advance would be impossible, but not very far. The savage who has no distinctive name for 'father' may have some conception of paternity, but must find it even harder than we do to conceive it as a purely biological relationship not necessarily bound up with the privileges and responsibilities of a particular class in a particular society. It is no less difficult to realize that a thing to which our language gives a name may have no objective existence—that we may have to banish the whole idea, like the hypothetical *ether* of 19th-Century physics. To a Melanesian, the existence of the word *mana* is almost a proof that there really is an uncanny force resident in such things as a stone shaped by nature or art to the likeness of something lucky or unlucky, a lightning-struck tree or a pregnant woman, which are, therefore (to quote another Melanesian word that has recently become familiar on civilized tongues) liable to be *taboo*. Magical notions may thus be so embedded in a language that no one who thinks in that language can easily doubt their validity. More developed languages are not free from similar shortcomings. It seems obvious to us that to *own* a pair of trousers and to *own* a loaf of bread involve the same notion; but the Crow Indians use distinct words and see no particular connexion between the two kinds of ownership. Is it not conceivable that some of our economic problems today may be due to a confusion of separate (or separable) things under the heading *ownership* or *property*?<sup>1</sup> And how many people assume that *Capitalism*, *Communism* or *Fascism* is the name of an actual thing as recognizable and unchanging as the Great Pyramid?<sup>2</sup>

There is in all languages (as in all civilizations) a common substratum of ideas expressive of 'primary human nature' as it responds to familiar objects of sense-perception. Of these Nietzsche's dictum holds good:

'The hundreds of different languages correspond to the same constant and elemental needs of mankind, and he who understands the needs could learn nothing new from the languages.' (*Use and Abuse of History*.)

But every language is also the vehicle of a particular civilization, reflecting the triumphs and limitations of its historical development. Even in prehistoric

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. A. Hobson's *Property and Improperly*.

<sup>2</sup> A lady once informed the writer, with more intelligence than she realized, that Fascism and Bolshevism were nothing to her but 'two black words'.



Europe we should expect to find different languages registering in a very concrete way the different tribal experiences and customs. And almost certainly we should find a diversity of dialects like that of Australia, where some 500 languages were formerly current among a total population of about 200,000. A few of these prehistoric dialects (though not necessarily European ones) must have been early forms of the languages spoken today, but their transformation must have been so great that probably even an expert could not recognize the connexion without some knowledge of the intermediate stages.

### *The Web of Custom*

By the time we have become tolerably familiar with the language of our hosts we shall have achieved a certain insight into the rules that govern their lives. We shall assuredly find that they draw a sharp distinction between what is customary and right and what is simply *not done* and therefore wrong. Except under the influence of a sudden gust of passion, a savage is generally found to obey the unwritten laws or customs of his community more devoutly than civilized men obey the laws laid down by state or church or recognized as morally binding. Some of these customs strike us as ridiculous or revolting—such as the widespread rules that a man must not look at his mother-in-law or that twins must be strangled at birth, which apparently spring from the same psychological roots as certain well-worn modern jests. But in many important respects the notions of right and wrong are similar in all human communities. Certain acts tend everywhere to evoke moral approval and admiration; others the reverse. Normally (though not invariably) the conduct approved is such as to promote the well-being of the community, and *vice versa*. Owing to the conservatism of moral judgements, we find that civilized communities still tend to idolize qualities such as physical courage, which (at least in time of peace) have lost much of their earlier 'survival value'. On the other hand, we everywhere find men of exceptionally wide sympathies or clear insight striving to enlarge the field of moral judgements or classify them on some more consistent basis. In the classification and clarification of disconnected rules, as in other branches of thought, men have doubtless progressed by way of unduly broad and simple generalizations. So we may expect, for instance, that our hosts would have a child's sense of retributive justice: 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Perhaps they will be satisfied if it is the offender's son who loses an eye or a tooth; for they are not likely to have any clear notion of the individual as morally responsible for his own acts. At much higher levels of civilization men have found it no easy task to disentangle this notion from the conception of guilt as a pollution that somehow defiles the guilty party and his kin—though it is surely an exaggeration to suggest that in the 'prelogical mentality' of the savage the individual does not exist. We should also expect, since untutored minds attach more importance to the outward act than to the motive, that no sharp line would be drawn between voluntary and involuntary offences.

We may find little sense of obligation to behave in any special way towards outsiders. Although within the tribe homicide is everywhere a serious offence, the killing of a non-member is seldom condemned and often praised. On the other hand, neither the head-hunters of Borneo nor the Red Indian braves, who count their prestige in scalps, are truly primitive. Among the Eskimoes, although homicide is not infrequent, war is unknown—there is no word for it in the language. The Australians and Bushmen, having well defined tribal territories with their own waterholes and patches of vegetation, are often involved in disputes over them; they indulge in a good deal of intertribal bickering, interminable blood-feuds or vendettas, where a death on one side must be balanced by one on the other, sometimes even in duels between champions or pitched battles. The battle scenes depicted in prehistoric cliff-drawings suggest something similar. But wars

of conquest or extermination begin at higher levels of material civilization. Food-gatherers have no surplus to support standing armies; there is no accumulated wealth to tempt attack; and everyone is far too busy.

Our tribe is likely to maintain diplomatic relations with some of its neighbours, carefully hedged about with ceremonial restrictions. There is good evidence for a certain amount of trade from the earliest human times in magical objects like shells or localized necessities like good flint or salt, which also acquired magical associations. From practices current in Australia and elsewhere, it may be conjectured that the economic advantages of trade were not realized till after a custom had developed of ceremonious interchange of tokens whose value was purely magical (or 'sentimental'). Moreover, many primitive tribes are divided into clans, such that members of one are not only allowed but compelled to choose their wives from another.<sup>1</sup> When tribes increase in numbers and split into sub-tribes, a system of interlocking marriage alliances may extend over a wide area. But at this stage the limit to the size of political units is soon reached. The men who live and hunt together regulate their affairs by discussion, dominated by outstanding individuals. Elaborate political organizations, which are formed mainly in order to get something done, have no place in such a static society. On the other hand, there is room for elaborate social groupings. Members of a tribe may be admitted by mysterious rites of initiation into appropriate age-groups, men's or women's clubs, or secret societies such as delight children. In particular, we find that in most primitive societies the psychological crisis of puberty, which also changes the relation of the individual to the community, is dramatized by making him undergo some painful or terrifying but emotionally satisfying ordeal. The objects found in one prehistoric cave site in France strongly suggest some such initiation ceremony.

The basic unit of society is normally, as we might expect, the family. It was a favourite theory of 19th-Century anthropologists that the family is a relatively recent development; within the clan, they supposed, there was a sort of group marriage; sexual relations were promiscuous; the father of a child was never known, and descent was traced through the mother. The latest evidence, however, suggests that, in societies where the biological role of the father is not recognized, this is due to fanciful theories about the origin of the soul rather than to primitive ignorance. Even here the social responsibilities of a father commonly devolve on some individual. Normally among uncivilized peoples, at any rate after the birth of a child, the union of husband and wife remains stable, and often monogamy is strictly enforced. As family units seem to be the rule among the higher apes also (though the male may not always be restricted to one 'wife'), there is little reason to doubt that this was the basic form of human society.<sup>2</sup> The marriage of near relations is almost universally forbidden: even apart from intermarrying *totemic* clans, the prohibited degrees of kinship among savages usually extend much farther than in Protestant countries. Modern biologists are no longer convinced that inbreeding is necessarily harmful. It would, however, commonly lead to a higher proportion of monstrous births, which might naturally make it *taboo* (as among the Nagas of Assam, who believe that it results in idiot

<sup>1</sup> In certain tribes (especially in Australia and North America) each clan acknowledges as its distinctive emblem some mythical common ancestor or patron, generally in animal form, which anthropologists call by the Algonquin word *totem*. The products of the teenening human fancy that are grouped under the heading *totemism* are so diverse, and their significance in political and religious history so controversial, that it has seemed safer not to single them out here for special treatment.

<sup>2</sup> Somewhat sweeping conclusions have been drawn from the discovery that the sexual relations of baboons at the Zoo are complex and far from idyllic, most of the females being apparently reserved for a few dominant males who have continually to defend their prerogative against younger rebels. Even if this were known to be natural among baboons, it would have little bearing on man, as the baboon is detached from the anthropoid stock.

or deformed children). Descent may be traced through either the father's or the mother's side. It is reported that in certain Bushman tribes the husband is scarcely more than a tolerated outsider in the wife's clan, so that naughty children, for instance, can be spanked only by their mother's brother or some other relative on her side. The adoption of the wife into the husband's clan (regular among pastoral peoples and underlying European society) is possibly less primitive. The relations between the two sides of the family are often extremely complex: in Melanesia, for instance, land is sometimes inherited in the female line but fruit-trees in the male line.

Great stress has sometimes been laid on 'marriage by capture' as a primitive institution—and, indeed, as a special mark of the 'cave man'. But it is now generally doubted whether this was ever anything more than a piece of make-believe or ritual performed with some magical intent—in some societies it is the bridegroom who is ceremonially 'captured'. Women in really primitive communities normally enjoy much more authority and freedom than in rather more developed ones. Polygamy with more than one wife (*polygyny*) is a later development, associated with property and especially slavery, and is seldom more than a privilege of the rich. It is made possible by the heavier death rate and later marriage of the males. *Polyandry* can arise only where there is an excess of males, which generally means that the struggle for existence is so severe that a proportion of the girls, being less valued than boys, is killed at birth. The ideal of female character varies widely—even more perhaps than that of male character—and there are big differences in the extent to which women participate in the social and ritual life of the community. To some extent, the status of woman depends on her economic functions: where wild roots or garden products are a staple food, the women who provide them may be overworked but cannot be overruled; where the men's work—hunting, stock-rearing, or ploughing—predominates, women may have an easier time but they are more likely to be bullied or despised. So, among English fisher-folk, where the women market the catch and hold the purse-strings, they are notoriously the dominant sex. The belief in the immeasurable inferiority of women, which prevails in almost all the higher civilizations except those based on Christianity, is also a recognized theory among many savage tribes. But theory does not always coincide with practice, and the distribution of the henpecked husband is probably world-wide. The numerous finds of female statuettes at prehistoric sites, coupled with the rarity of any portrayal of the male form, do not justify sweeping conclusions about primitive matriarchy. They were probably designed to promote by magical means the fertility of the tribe. But their form reveals also that reverent sense of the mystery of motherhood which later found expression in the worship of the Mother Goddess and which has been woman's great safeguard even in the rudest society.

Infanticide (chiefly of girls) is practically a necessity in such areas as the Pacific Islands, where there is no room for the population to expand—as happened also in Classical Greece. In times of famine or other hardship, it is very widely practised, though the custom of some even of the lowliest savages forbids it. Once a child has been allowed to live, its life is afterwards as carefully protected as that of an adult. If there is one thing we do know about our early ancestors, it is that they did not neglect their children, or we should never have existed. Inadequate care of the young means race suicide. We find in fact that savages are often most indulgent parents. They do not, on the whole, maintain discipline by corporal punishment; but they make great use of bogeys, whose memory lingers as a shadow on the adult mind. The young go through a fairly thorough apprenticeship in the practical activities of the tribe, and the initiation ceremonies generally include formal schooling in tribal lore and traditions.

Care of the old is biologically less important and is scarcely known among the

animals, though gregarious species benefit by the experience of the older members of the herd. In human societies, such experience is of greater value and, though respect for elders seems to be less deeply ingrained than devotion to the young, it is effectively reinforced in most communities by customary *taboos*. Among some peoples, however, who lead a hard life, especially those that are always on the march, it is the custom to abandon or kill the aged and infirm, often at their own request.

Since the days of Herodotus, the civilized conscience has been shocked by tales of savages who are moved by filial piety to eat their parents. But cannibalism, where it occurs, is more often confined to the bodies of enemies and is associated with a magical notion of acquiring their strength and courage (like the theory that beef extract confers on a consumer the strength, though presumably not the other qualities, of the ox). Cannibalism has seldom been important except where, as in some Pacific and Caribbean islands, a population used to a meat diet had migrated to a region where meat is scarce. Certain finds suggest that the Neandertal submen sometimes indulged in it, but there is no reason to regard it as a universal practice of 'primitive man'.

There is better evidence for primitive communism in goods than in wives. But indeed food-gathering man has few goods that can be treated as property, common or private. That the proprietary impulse is deep-seated is shown, for instance, by its early appearance in children and by Darwin's story of the monkey at the Zoo that used to crack nuts with a private stone, which it hid in its bedding and jealously guarded from its fellows. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that the tools and ornaments of early man were so private that they were buried in the grave with the owner. Among many peoples today this practice is bound up with magical notions: anything that has belonged to a dead man is infected with mortality; it is full of *mana*; therefore it is *taboo*, and not to be used by living men. These notions are hard to disentangle from the belief that the deceased may have need of his possessions after death. But less personal goods fall into a different category. Among hunting peoples, a slain animal may be adjudged to belong to the first hunter to see it or to wound it, or to the one who gave the finishing stroke. Custom may allow (or rather, oblige) him to distribute the best joints to particular individuals among his own kindred; it does not allow him to monopolize the prize. He has the credit of having scored the goal; but the concrete advantage is shared by the side. In such communities, land cannot of course be strictly private, trespassers prosecuted, etc.; but among some fairly stationary hunters (like the Veddas) the tribal territory is parcelled out into family hunting grounds with definite boundaries. Curiously enough, savage custom often allows private ownership of a type that has not long been recognized by English law. An Andamanese Pygmy has an indefeasible copyright in a song of his own composition; no one else may sing it without his permission. Certain North American Indians similarly patent their inventions of such things as songs, stories, dances, or decorative designs; some even make quite a livelihood out of the sale of helpful visions or dreams. But clearly the accumulation of property in a few hands does not begin till there is surplus property to accumulate and men are not perpetually on the verge of starvation. A man can use only one boat at a time; if an Eskimo has two boats, tribal morality insists that a man who has no boat shall have the use of the spare one for seal-hunting. That is one of those bits of obvious common sense to which men seem to have been blinded by civilization.

#### *Art, Science and Magic*

Hitherto we have glanced at prehistoric painting and sculpture only to note some of the figures and objects represented. We have yet to ask why they were

made at all—what was in the minds of the men who expended so much of their precious energy and resources on such a profitless task?

The simplest answer, no doubt, is that the artist was moved by that sheer creative impulse that comes upon a child who is let loose with a coloured pencil and a nice stretch of drawing-room wallpaper, or even on a chimpanzee which traces the outline of its shadow with an exploring finger. Stimulated perhaps by the sight of a rock formation vaguely suggestive of a mammoth, he plays a game of make-believe, in which it is a real mammoth, and puts in a touch or two with charcoal or chisel to add artistic verisimilitude. In thus indulging his private imagination, he is making his image public property—part of the shared experience of the tribe—just as if he had translated it into speech or gesture. Pictorial art was from the first a means of communication, though it was long before it developed into the stereotyped signs of picture-writing and longer still before these were used as symbols of spoken sounds.

If our guess at the origin of language was correct, the prosaic verbal image, 'Let us go and hunt a mammoth,' is an attenuated residue of something much more full-blooded—a mammoth song, accompanied no doubt by a mammoth dance. In the shared excitement of this ceremony, the mental image of the mammoth would take on a form as emotionally compelling as the martial music and flying colours with which a more civilized community steels itself for the arduous business of war. Better still if the image can be embodied, by the skill of the artist, in some tangible object there in the midst. Here is the perfect centre and climax of the drama, for which we may borrow words used by an Ojibway Indian when he pierced a picture of an animal with an arrow:

I shoot thee, O beast, in the heart!  
I smite thy heart!  
My friends, every beast,  
I smite it assuredly!

(Quoted in R. R. Schmidt: *The Dawn of the Human Mind* [English edition 1936], p. 166).

While we cannot prove that such a scene was ever enacted in prehistoric Europe, it does fit in with all we know of the life and ideas of modern hunting peoples. The dancing man, disguised as a deer, who figures in one cave painting, might well be taking part in a *corroboree*—one of those combinations of feast, dance and ritual drama by which the Australian Aborigines arouse communal enthusiasm. These rites are generally supposed to serve some practical purpose, such as inducing a particular game animal to multiply. An important part is often played in them by painted symbols, but these are so stylized and non-representational that no one could guess their meaning without inside knowledge. Along these lines we can understand the close association of primitive art with a particular type of culture, based on organized hunting, and can also explain many peculiarities of the actual works of art.

The cave paintings of France and Spain, in their typical form, are highly realistic pictures, mostly of game animals such as mammoth, deer and bison. They are seldom painted near the cave mouth, where the traces of habitation are found and where we might expect to see drawing-room decorations. Many are in the dank mysterious depths, where the artist must have worked by the light of a primitive oil lamp among the eerie shadows. They are not often grouped in any recognizable design, and one painting is sometimes laid on over another. In some the heart of the beast is indicated, occasionally with a spear thrust into it. The supposed Cave of Initiation contained a life-size clay model of a bear, scarred with wounds, to which had been attached an actual bear's skull. The art of the North African school (which also spread into Spain) is different in many ways: its typical manifestation is a sketch, without colour or relief, representing

on a small scale a group of figures in violent action. But here again the favourite themes are connected with the chase, and there are many hints of magical beliefs.

On this view, prehistoric men created works of art (doubtless including poetry, music and dancing) because as imaginative beings they were impelled to do things to the actual world so as to bring it into harmony with the world of their imagining (or their wishful thinking): they were actualizing their mental images, and so communicating them. By his symbolism of shape or sound, the artist focused the thoughts of the community on a single object and so strengthened their common aim. If he also delighted in the symbol for its own sake, learning to portray more dexterously and more pleasingly, to observe more inquisitively and exactly, he was certainly diverting some of his energy from the immediate business of living; but he was also acquiring skill and knowledge which, apart from their independent value as elements of 'good life', might prove in the long run to serve some more practical end. On the other hand, there was a perpetual danger that men would misunderstand the real value of the symbol—that they would confuse the worlds of imagery and of action. If they came to regard the symbol with its attendant ceremonial as a substitute for the hard work of digging an actual pitfall, for instance, they were in danger of catching only a symbolic mammoth, and that way lay hunger and death. In the light of these possible developments, we can consider the paintings and carvings of the Reindeer Age as rudimentary manifestations of various human activities designed to meet various needs and more explicitly distinguished at a later stage as 'pure art', science and magic.

Regarded primarily as art (i.e. as a revelation of the author's imagination), these works in their chronological sequence give some indication of the development of man's inner life. It was not till fairly late in the Reindeer Age that the artists perfected the technique of realistic representation (which was so amazingly preserved by the Bushmen). From that they passed to a more impressionistic style in which animal and human figures gradually changed into formalized symbols or designs (more nearly of the Australian type), such as appear on the painted pebbles that represent the last phase of prehistoric art in Europe. This change is comparable, and perhaps roughly contemporary, with the development of North African drawings into Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. We may conjecture that there was a corresponding transition in language, such as we have described above, from more concrete and picturesque to more abstract and logical modes of expression. In historical times a whole society has sometimes seemed to lose interest in the visible world and turn to a more mystical and introvert view of life; it is a plausible speculation, for which we shall note more evidence later, that the decline in prehistoric art which attended the breakdown of the hunting communities was accompanied by some such shift in the focus of popular interest.

In their more realistic phase, the cave paintings were not only works of art but works of science, which may even have had some practical value in teaching young hunters to distinguish between different species of game with different habits. Before the artist turned his mental image into visible shape, he had first to form it from his experience of the visible world. In so far as he depended on accurate *observation*, seeking to bring the imaginary into harmony with the actual, he was a pioneer of genuine science. The high standard of realism attained suggests that the men of the Reindeer Age, like the modern Bushmen and Australians, were in fact very faithful observers of nature, to say nothing of the accurate knowledge they must have possessed of the sources and properties of the materials used as pigments.

Science starts with observation, particularly of *coincidences* (in time and space) and of *resemblances*. We observe in a number of instances that, if a man is bitten by an adder, he suffers pain and sometimes dies; we therefore generalize

these instances into a Law of Nature, that adder bites cause illness or death, and we act accordingly. Or we observe that adders are often found in heathy country, and infer some sort of natural relation between heaths and adders. But, in order to arrive at the notion of an adder, we (or our instructors) must first have classified a number of experiences, noting resemblances and differences. Out of the shifting panorama that presents itself to our eyes, we pick out certain gliding objects and class them together as snakes. The process is aided by our ears, attuned to the characteristic hiss and rustle, and by our fingers, responsive to the cold dry feel of the scales. Smell and taste play a smaller part, though they probably count for more with savages than with civilized adults. If we (or the community that created our language) have had occasion to take a special interest in snakes, we shall probably distinguish adders and grass-snakes before arriving at the general notion of 'snake'. If not, we shall adopt the wider classification of the farmer who summed up his views on ornithology in the sentence: 'We calls 'em all sparrers.' Such observations and inferences are the groundwork of science, and it is largely by extending, combining and testing them (i.e. comparing our mental image with the object as actually perceived) that scientific knowledge is built up.

But we may easily be misled by resemblances—into believing, for instance, that grass-snakes are dangerous. And the resemblance may be an accidental or a purely fanciful one, having no significance outside the world of imagining. To us, the fact that a certain fern is named from its shape 'adder's tongue' is simply a figure of speech. But to the mind untrained to distinguish symbol from reality the name is not just a label that men have attached to the fern; it is something inherent in the fern, belonging to it just as naturally as its shape or colour. Now it is a common theory that like cures like, as emetics are a remedy for sickness or rubbing with snow for frostbite; moreover, when a man takes 'a hair of the dog that bit him', he feels the satisfaction of getting a bit of his own back. It is therefore an easy inference that 'adder's tongue' is a remedy for the bite of an adder. So we pass, like the men who speared a make-believe mammoth, beyond science into the realm of magic, in which symbols have a mysterious power over the things symbolized. A refinement of the same word-magic appears in spells, curses and blessings (in so far as no religious notions intrude); it also, no doubt, underlies the reluctance of many people to utter a formal untruth when they would not hesitate to deceive by silence or quibbling.

Similarly, we may be misled by a chance coincidence, as a tribe in Nigeria recently jumped to the conclusion that an outbreak of pest among their cattle was caused by an aircraft that had flown over a short time before. Suppose, when we see an eclipse of the sun, we draw the inference that the sun is being swallowed by some mysterious monster. We naturally try to drive it off, as we should any other wild animal, by making a loud noise. And the experiment works; the monster is driven off. We now know what to do when an eclipse happens; and it would be a quite unjustifiable risk at such a crisis not to adopt what is in fact, in many parts of the world, the approved remedy. Even a scientifically trained medical man, for instance, used to checking his results in every imaginable way, may be misled by such a coincidence into adopting quite the wrong treatment for a disease, or making a successful treatment the basis for a wrong theory. It is not surprising that in an uncritical and conservative community useless or even harmful practices acquire the sanction of custom and persist indefinitely.

It is possible to distinguish, in theory at least, between false conclusions reached by strictly scientific methods and the more dangerous delusions due to magic, with which they are commonly entangled. Magic, in the sense in which the word is used in this book, is an activity based on a confusion between the imaginary and the actual. We have thus found it creeping in as a by-product of

art, in which men try to adapt the actual world to the imaginary, and of science, in which they adapt imagination to actuality. This confusion is the prime weakness of man as the imaginative animal. Art and science both demand hard work. Magic follows the easy path of wishful thinking (darkened by its shadow, fearful thinking). We have no means, except painful experience, of learning the limitations of art—the point beyond which the actual refuses to submit to our will, which strives to adjust it to the picture we have imagined. By willing we can move our own limbs. By appropriate gestures, words or 'charm' we can induce other people to move theirs. The same method works to a less extent with animals, and we naturally tend to try it also on inanimate objects, such as a ball after it has left the player's hand. So we find men always eager to believe in magical methods of extending the range of their will-power—striving to project the imagined end into the actual world without performing the activities which in fact lead to that end.

We can scarcely expect the savage to draw a logical distinction between the throwing-stick, which increases by mechanical means the distance for which he can throw a spear, and the magic signs carved on the shaft, which may achieve the same effect by increasing his confidence. But, while mechanical devices gradually become commonplace, magical devices in order to be effective must remain on the threshold of the unknown, charged with a sense of mystery that is at once alluring and terrifying. To define the difference between the natural and the supernatural might puzzle a trained philosopher; but the simplest savage is capable of feeling that some objects or acts differ from the rest in being *uncanny*. Magic belongs as much to the darkness as science to the daylight—which some find relatively flat and uninspiring.

In this emotional or neurotic atmosphere of magic lies its value and its danger. The hunter who thrust his spear into the clay image of the mammoth was filled with a new hope, which steadied his aim in the hunt, allaying that fear of failure and consequent starvation which accompanied the human gift of imaginative foresight. And such fanciful hope has doubtless helped to tide man over from the instinctive confidence of the brutes to a reasoned confidence born of some knowledge of the actual processes of nature. But with the magical hope goes a magical fear—the fear that makes an Irish peasant woman shrink from being photographed, lest her image (and therefore her actual self) should come into the power of an enemy; the fear lest some person or thing in some mysterious way may be working black magic against us. To counter these fancied dangers, men have devised precautionary measures more elaborate than ever found their way into an A.R.P. handbook, often taking the form of self-inflicted privation or mutilation. Savages in many parts of the world (notably the Bushmen) are in the habit of cutting off finger-joints or whole fingers lest a worse thing befall—though they are apt to be vague and confused about the actual purpose of the operation. We know from the imprints of mutilated hands stencilled on cave walls that the Europeans of the Reindeer Age were already a prey to such fantastic fears.

Perhaps men have always been dimly aware of an element of make-believe in their magic. But intelligent individuals, who might most easily have been disillusioned by repeated nonfulfilment of these hopes and fears, had less motive for dispelling them than for playing upon them. The ingenious quacks who exploit our hopes and fears today may justifiably boast that they are following the oldest profession in the world. There are simple societies where magicians or medicine men are the only specialists, and they devote great ingenuity to the elaboration of their art. In part they are certainly the dupes of their own subtlety: they may themselves succumb to the magic of their rivals. Partly convinced, partly sceptical, they have wielded immense power, especially in more thriving communities



where the rewards of power are more substantial. The sceptic would thus find himself confronted not only by the solid mass of conservative opinion but by the professional jealousy of a medical council of witch-doctors or the vested interest of some family that enjoyed the patent rights in a valued formula or prescription.

Magical beliefs, by conferring a mysterious authority on tribal leaders and customs, have certainly served, like the catchwords of political parties, the useful purpose of keeping groups of men united and thus able to work for common ends, besides giving a heightened interest to otherwise monotonous tasks. But, where magic has become too deeply ingrained, men have sunk into a terrified inertia. They have even yielded to such destructive notions as that natural deaths and other unaccountable misfortunes are the work of some magician, who must be 'smelt out' by a professional detector and put to death. Men, unlike the animals, are affected by things not only as they are but also as they are believed to be; they may thus adapt themselves, with pain and toil, to a purely fictitious environment such as that built up by the magician out of human hopes and fears. At the best, magic has been a tempting will-o'-the-wisp that has led many of the best minds astray from the stony path to knowledge.

### *Religion*

'The messages of God,' says Shaw's St. Joan, 'come to us from our imagination.' It is because men have cut adrift from nature, and learnt to interpose a world of fantasy between them and it, that they feel the need of gods and are able to conceive them. It is no slur on religion to suggest that, like art, science and magic, it originates in man's power of image-making. Nor does this imply that it is identical with, or derived from, any of the other three. The devotee of any religion believes certain doctrines intended, like scientific theories, to explain 'experience, though not precisely the same experience. He takes part in certain ritual activities that appeal, like works of art, to the sense of beauty. He is perpetually in danger of that confusion of the symbolic with the actual which is the essence of magic. But in all this he is striving to satisfy a distinctive human need, the need for that particular emotion or experience which we qualify as religious.

In accordance with the conception of man as a creature who has broken loose from nature, we can explain the religious need as springing from his sense of isolation, and the religious emotion (in the language of many mystics) as a sense of reunion. This breaking away is repeated in the life of every individual, and to that extent this explanation agrees with the Freudian theory that the religious impulse is a desire to return to the dependence of infancy. Man has become a separate little universe by becoming a personality. When he tries to re-establish emotional contact with the larger universe, he finds it natural to conceive that also as not less personal than himself. When I feel an emotion of anger against a stone on which I have stubbed my toe, I am guilty of the 'pathetic fallacy', the attribution of feeling to that which (so far as we know) cannot feel. An elephant that tears up a thorn-bush on which it has pricked its trunk does something similar. My simple emotional need is satisfied by implicitly personifying the stone, or the perverse sprite who has put it in my path. When I feel an emotion of awe in the presence of a waterfall, I am vaguely worshipping the nymph or genius of the place. There seems to be something in man that refuses to accept a lifeless, impersonal universe—something that is always searching behind phenomena for a reality that is not only 'it', nor even 'he' or 'she', but 'thou'. If we define religion as this yearning to be on friendly terms with the universe, we shall find its essence neither in the ritual acts by which men have sought to express or stimulate it nor in the myths and dogmas by which (at a somewhat later stage) they have linked it to the world of normal experience.

It is not for the historian to pronounce how far the devotees of any faith are justified in regarding it as the key to realities beyond the reach of their five senses. He cannot, however, disregard the plain fact that such faith, in many forms, has not only altered men's conception of their nature and their role in the universe but has empowered them to transform their own lives and even to revolutionize the ideals and institutions of whole societies.<sup>1</sup>

If (as we have suggested) man's religious need is part of his primary nature, we should expect to find it influencing the growth of civilization from the beginning. To the 19th-Century materialists, who first approached the problem in a scientific spirit, religion was a regrettable illusion to which man fell a victim at a relatively late stage in his evolution, and they devised various theories to account for its origin. 'Primitive Man', they supposed, had no more religion than the animals. But he early became aware of forces whose working he did not understand. An unexpected occurrence, such as a thunderstorm or a sneeze, that could not be linked with any previous event in the actual world, must be fitted somehow into the world of imagination. Perhaps it had been willed by someone and effected by magic. Or perhaps the willing agent was not a human being at all, but some being or beings unknown. It might thus come to be believed that the magician in bringing on a shower or cursing an enemy was not setting in operation some natural process but binding by sorcery the will of a supernatural being. As the unknown beings were more vividly imagined and stories were told about them, they tended to become more human; so the sorcerer became a priest, and his magical formulae were conceived as petitions or prayers in the form pleasing to the gods. Other magical acts, such as the making of images, or the burning of unlucky objects, or the solemn slaughter and eating of lucky animals, or the pouring out of a liquid to make rain, could then be reinterpreted as methods of propitiating the gods by idol-worship or sacrifice.

Another line of reasoning is suggested by men's various ways of disposing of the dead. An intensely religious people (witness ancient Israel) is not necessarily preoccupied with death and afterlife. When we find a society hopefully providing for the welfare of its deceased members, we may classify their procedure as merely magical; but we can hardly doubt that it was prompted by a feeling of awe at the miracle and tragedy of life and death—a feeling closely akin to religion. We may thus get a hint of the prehistory of religion when we find that, parallel with the growth of artistic realism leading on to symbolism, there was a similar sequence in burial customs. Neandertal Man buried his dead with their weapons beside them. The hunters of the Reindeer Age carried realism so far as to cover the body with red ochre, presumably as a substitute for red blood—a custom preserved, together with realistic art, by the Bushmen. When we find later peoples, as at Ofnet, ceremonially interring the skull alone, we suspect that they were treating it as a symbol of a living personality no longer identified with the body. The still later custom of cremation suggests an attempt to release the life from the body in the form of smoke or 'breath' (Sanskrit *ātma*; Greek *psyché*; Latin *spiritus*, *anima*, etc). Already, perhaps, men were peopling their world with disembodied shadows or images of the dead, such as appear in dreams, among whom the ghosts or souls of great leaders would naturally be of special importance, while those of parents or ancestors would command a special measure of filial respect and devotion.

In the light of such popular modern theories we can better understand many of the manifestations of religious faith, so long as we recognize the undercurrent of impulse to discover gods in one form or another. But it is quite possible that

<sup>1</sup> A good definition of religion in this sense is Olaf Stapledon's (*Unfinished World*, p. 182): 'intense and deeply rooted admiration, either of God or of gods or of the universe or at least of something more than human beings'.

the religious impulse may have found an outlet at an early period in a relatively 'pure' form, with little admixture of magic or ghost worship. There is evidence that several very primitive peoples have at least a vague conception of a 'High God' or Heavenly Father who cannot readily be explained away as an echo of missionary teaching from the 'higher religions'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the founder of such a faith, in some instances, is known to have been a gifted member of the tribe that held it. Throughout recorded history there have been mystics who taught that ritual was only a means to the experience of the inexpressible reality and dogma only an imperfect attempt to express it. But their less gifted disciples have lost sight of the reality in elaborating the means of approach and expression and exalting them into unchallengeable sanctities. Even among the Eskimoes, we find medicine men who are sincere visionaries convinced that through solitude and suffering they have attained true wisdom and indignant at the trickeries practised by their rivals. This conflict between the spirit and the letter may have begun far back in prehistoric times.

Savages, like civilized men, have a great capacity for taking things for granted. But they are no less subject to moods of bewilderment, to the feeling that

Men are homesick in their homes  
And strangers under the sun.

If early religious speculation often seems to us to be floundering in seas since charted by science, does this not mean that religion is the growing-point of the human spirit, a tendril always reaching out into the unknown in the faith that (as the Stoic Seneca put it) 'the gods stretch forth a hand to those climbing up to them'?

Turning once more, then, to the ritual Mammoth Dance which we have supposed to be a feature in the life of our prehistoric tribe, we may now conjecture that it contained an element of religion as well as an element of magic.<sup>2</sup> Primarily, no doubt, the participants were performing a magical or pseudo-scientific operation, ostensibly intended to increase the supply of mammoths or bring them into the power of the hunters and actually strengthening the sense of assurance and community of purpose. But at the same time, as like as not, they were invoking the aid of some supernatural being or beings—some superman or supermammoth—of whom they could form at least a vague mental image. Perhaps he already figured in a folk-tale, in which the little fellow masters the giant by cunning as man was mastering the mammoth; or in a nature myth, in which thunder is caused by an unseen mammoth crashing through an unseen thicket. By this act of worship, likewise, they would be accomplishing something other than their conscious intention: they would be fulfilling the need to enter into some sort of communion with the powers ruling the universe. We cannot suppose that they were seriously perturbed by the inconsistency between the magical and the religious aspect of their performance, still less by the difference (viewed from either aspect) between what they thought they were doing and what they actually were

<sup>1</sup> Much that has been written about the theological subtlety and sublime natural philosophy of these simple folk is no doubt rather fantastic. Not everyone will share the enthusiasm of Father Wilhelm Schmidt on finding that the Pygmies of the French Congo have reached 'the exalted idea of creation out of nothing, an ideal never grasped even by the mighty intellect of Aristotle' (In E. Eyre: *European Civilization*, Vol. I). The evidence for the 'high gods of low peoples' is set out in Father Schmidt's *Origin and Growth of Religion* (English edition, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the description (in C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann: *The Veddas* [1911]) of the pantomimic dance in which the hunter goes through the motions of catching a boar, uttering words of obviously magical intent ('This is a fine big boar and I will kill it!') interspersed with prayers for success addressed to the ancestral spirit by whom he believes himself possessed. The Veddas rely on charms for catching smaller game, reinforced by prayers and sacrifices to the appropriate spirits for bigger game. Sometimes they indulge in light-hearted parodies of their own ritual dances, just for amusement. This suggests that their cave paintings, which are also said to be made just for amusement, may at times have had a magical or religious significance.

doing. It was left for the prophets and sages of a later day to call attention to such discrepancies and draw their several inferences as to the nature of God and man.

*For Better or for Worse?*

We are about to say farewell to man the food-gatherer, man the uncivilized, man as near as may be in the state to which nature through countless generations has adapted him. We cannot but pause at this stage to ask whether the adventure of civilization has justified itself. Perhaps, like Sam Weller's schoolboy who had at last mastered the alphabet, we may wonder whether it was worth going through so much for the sake of so little. Perhaps it is true that 'primitive man' was morally better than we are, in the sense that he lived up to the customary standards of his tribe better than we do to ours. He had indeed little opportunity to do otherwise; he had few temptations and no privacy. It is more relevant to ask whether he was happier than we are, but even harder to answer. Let us look at him, before we part, at his best and happiest. Hunting has been good. There is food enough and to spare. The magic has worked. And, if there is any notion at the back of the groping mind that the world is ruled by supernatural, vaguely personal, powers, tonight he feels confident that they are on his side: there is a tinge of gratitude in the general sense of well-being. The evening passes in song and dance and horseplay round the camp-fire—rude and jolly, but with a touch of that ritual solemnity which the savage interweaves with his everyday activities. The beauties of the tribe make the most of their charms. The young men, especially those who have distinguished themselves in the day's hunt, strut like peacocks and boast wildly of their exploits. There is no worry about the future; no hostile attack to be apprehended; no overlord to surprise us with a demand for service or taxation; no round of stupefying drudgery to look forward to on the morrow. Here surely are the children of nature, as sensible and happy as urchins or puppy-dogs at play.

But the tiny peep we have had into the thoughts and feelings of the company is enough to disillusion us. It is not the memory or prospect of a hand-to-hand fight with hunger and cold and pain that darkens them—physical pain means far less to the savage than to the oversensitive townsman—but the shadow of fear, all the darker because its object is undefined. Man's ancestors must have retained something of the natural timidity of hunted animals.<sup>1</sup> But, as soon as men acquired the gift of imagination—as soon, that is, as they became fully human—they entered the realm of imaginary terrors, from which they have ever since been struggling, inch, by inch, to escape. Civilization at its best has brought a measure of restraint into the riotous growth of man's imagination and consequently into the whole of his inner life. The carefree moods and generous impulses of savages are balanced by violent fits of blind anger, jealousy and wounded pride, leading easily to bloodshed, sometimes to suicide. To control these impulses and allay his fears, he has found no better way than to fence himself about with a barbed-wire entanglement of conventions and *taboos*, sometimes wise and necessary, often fantastic and terrifying or merely bothersome.

Of all that has been written about 'primitive man' and his outlook on the world, nothing perhaps is more revealing than the answer given by a thoughtful Eskimo as to the origin of his tribal customs.

<sup>1</sup>gathered in friendly talk with strangers, even those whom they have every reason to trust, they prefer to remain squatting on their heels, rather than to sit down on a mat; and the tension of their muscles, combined with the still alert watchfulness of their faces, conveys the impression that they are ready to leap up and flee away or to struggle for their lives at any moment'.

'Why must there be snow and storms and bad weather for hunting, for us who must hunt for our daily food, who seek meat for ourselves and those we love? Why must hunters, after they have slaved all day, return without a catch? Why must the children of my neighbour sit shivering huddled under a skin-rug, hungry? Why must my old sister suffer pain at the ending of her days? She has done no wrong that we can see, but lived her many years and given birth to good strong children.

'Even you cannot answer when we ask you why life is as it is. And so it must be. Our customs all come from life and are directed toward life; we cannot explain, we do not believe in this or that; but the answer lies in what I have just told you. We fear! We fear the elements with which we have to fight in their fury to wrest our food from land and sea. We fear cold and famine in our snow huts. We fear the sickness that is daily to be seen among us—not death, but the suffering. We fear the souls of the dead, of human and animal alike. We fear the spirits of earth and air. And therefore our fathers, taught by their fathers before them, guarded themselves about with all these old rules and customs, which are built upon the experience and knowledge of generations. We do not know how or why, but we obey them that we may be suffered to live in peace. And for all our *angakoks* [medicine men] and their knowledge of hidden things, we yet know so little that we fear everything else.'<sup>1</sup>

This is not the cry of a dispirited defeatist remnant, demoralized by contact with an incomprehensible civilization. There is nothing to suggest that the superstitious fears were imported. Certainly they were not begotten by such languorous fancies as might run riot in a lotus-eating clime that allows the mind to relax its grip on harsh reality. We are listening here to the authentic voice of a brave and resourceful people who meet the challenge of a grim environment with a cheerful good humour that we cannot but admire. And it may stand for the last message of our forbears on the brink of civilization to us who are puzzled by the same questions and haunted by the same fears. For we too have little to guide us but the rules obeyed by our fathers' fathers and the scanty knowledge of our medicine men. And, though we have thrust some of the old fears at arm's length, they are with us still—some as substantial as cold and hunger, others as shadowy as the spirits of earth and air.

In the most primitive communities, though we do not find bodily slavery, we shall find no refuge from mental slavery.

Ere the first sower flung the seed that tied man to the soil,  
Or ever roofs were stuffed with thatch or pots were set to boil,  
Ere the first weaver stretched his warp or bronzesmith forged a chain,  
Man meshed himself with cobwebs spun from his itching brain.

We may find much in primitive society that arouses admiration and envy and the desire to imitate. Up to a point, there is no reason why modern civilized man should not imitate it. Our institutions were made by and for us, and we can change them. We can, metaphorically as well as literally, put the clock back; or we can smash the clock altogether, like the machine-haters of Erewhon. But, if we return to the simple life, we shall not bring simple minds with us. We have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and the knowledge is of good as well as of evil. We have won a little freedom, if only we can use it.

<sup>1</sup> K. Rasmussen: *Intellectual Culture of the Ighulik Eskimos* quoted by Paul Radin: *Primitive Religion: its Nature and Origin* [1938], p. 54.

## IV

## THE FIRST FOOD-PRODUCERS

*The Earliest Settlements*

**H**OWEVER much of the preceding chapter may be classed as pure speculation, it can be taken as certain that less than 20,000 (perhaps less than 10,000) years ago the human inhabitants of Europe still contrived to subsist by preying on other creatures with the aid of weapons or tools chipped out of flint or some similarly flaky stone, as their human and subhuman predecessors had done for many hundreds of centuries. If Europe had enjoyed the climatic stability and splendid isolation of Australia, there is no obvious reason why their descendants should not be living much the same sort of life today. Actually, the last phases of the Reindeer Age culture in western Europe were succeeded, after a relatively short interval, by a very different culture, whose most enduring memorial is a series of implements fashioned from various hard stones by grinding and polishing—an easier and less chancy process than flaking flint, but more laborious. According to the simple classification devised last century by the first systematic students of prehistory, the 'Old Stone Age' had passed, presumably by a long drawn out evolutionary process, into the 'New Stone Age'; this was supposed to have begun about 12000 B.C. at latest and to have lasted till the beginning of the 'Bronze Age' some 10,000 years later.

But it has become increasingly clear that the change in the technique of working stone was only one minor aspect of a startling revolution, the biggest perhaps in human history, that affected every activity of life. In the New Stone Age, men lived in permanent habitations, such as the wooden huts, built on piles over water or swamp, whose remains have been found in or beside many of the Swiss Lakes. Moreover, they kept sheep and cattle, wove linen cloth and made pots of earthenware. Since they depended for a living on animals and plants of non-European origin, they obviously cannot have 'evolved' their new mode of life in Europe, as the Australian Aborigines (whatever else they might have accomplished) could not have evolved the civilization of present-day Australia. Even the distinctive polished stone tools appear to include copies of designs that had been developed elsewhere by copper-workers. It is now generally held, therefore, that the New Stone Age in western Europe was only a short-lived forerunner (3000–2000 B.C.?) of the Bronze Age, and the cultures of both these ages were fast-spreading offshoots of the rising civilizations of the East.

In the transition from the Old Stone Age to the New, one potent factor is believed to have been a change of climate, whose effects began to be apparent after about 8000 B.C. Following the retreating ice-sheet, the rainy belt (characterized by a succession of heavy depressions drifting in from the Atlantic) moved gradually northwards from North Africa to approximately its present latitude. Thanks to this increase in rainfall, Europe became covered with a dense forest, such as would soon overspread the face of England now if man's hand were withdrawn. The reindeer retired into Lapland; the wild horse into central Asia; the mammoth to the Happy Hunting Grounds. The other species of big game became more restricted in range and harder to track down. The whole basis of human life was changed, and at first the change was much for the worse. The population, never very large, no doubt shrank still further. The survivors were mainly restricted to the sea-shore. The coasts of Britain and the Baltic countries are littered in many places with huge heaps of shells that are their 'kitchen middens'. Gathering winkles is a less stimulating occupation than hunting big game, and the resulting diet is less sustaining. We need not be surprised therefore to find

evidence of a marked deterioration in material culture, besides the artistic decline already noticed. There are signs, however, of more serious efforts to cope with the crisis by developing bone harpoons and other implements for fishing, such as are used by the Eskimoes, and also heavy stone axes that may have been used to make clearings in these unwelcome forests. A life based on fishing was practicable also further inland along the rivers and lakes. It is possible that, in response to this new challenge, the Swiss Lake-dwellers (or Swamp-dwellers) had already settled in permanent habitations (like the fishing tribes of British Columbia) before they were enriched with those new resources that inaugurated the New Stone Age.

Meanwhile, owing to the same northward shift of the rainy belt, the inhabitants of more southerly lands were faced with a different challenge. North Africa, except for a narrow strip along the coast, became a sandy desert. So did Arabia. Most of Asia Minor, Iran and northwestern India were similarly dried up, though not so completely. However, the mountains bordering this dry zone still enjoyed abundant rainfall, and the outflow from them cut across the desert area in three places, forming the Nile, the Indus and the Two Rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) of Mesopotamia, which now unite before reaching the sea but were formerly separate; the silt washed down by them has pushed forward the coastline of the Persian Gulf some 60 miles in the last 5,000 years. These four rivers must have been edged by dense swampy growth, shading off into jungle or scrub, all well stocked with beast and bird life. Between the mouth of the Nile and the big bend of the Euphrates lie Palestine and Syria, which enjoy a winter rainfall adequate in places to support wheat, vine and olive (whose ancestors may have grown wild there) and the cedars of Lebanon, besides herbage for grazing animals. This country strikes a European as unpleasantly dry; to a desert-dweller, however, it must always have seemed a 'land flowing with milk and honey'. Here, then, in the valleys of Indus and Nile and the Fertile Crescent running round from Palestine to the Persian Gulf, a considerable part of the animal and human population of this median zone of the Old World must have congregated as the climate grew slowly drier. And it is here that the earliest traces have been found (some perhaps as early as 5000 B.C.) of men who lived in fixed settlements, in intimate association with presumably useful and submissive animals and engaged in tilling the earth that it might bring forth fruit in due season. It is not known which of these valleys was first in the field; and it is possible that river valleys further east—the Ganges, or the Tarim, or the Hoang-Ho—may yet enter the running.

From the similarity of their artefacts (notably pottery, which henceforth becomes the archaeologist's most precious clue), it is evident that there was some intercourse between the settlers at these various sites. Racially, they were predominantly 'Mediterranean', though men of 'Alpine' type had apparently penetrated even as far south as Egypt in prehistoric times. Egypt had been peopled also by roving bands of hunters who drifted in from the West as the Sahara country grew drier; and other immigrants may have come down the Nile. Linguistically, the Egyptians are classed in the *Hamitic* group, comprising all the native peoples of Africa north and east of the Sahara. The *Semitic* family of languages (perhaps originally an offshoot of the Hamitic) seems to have spread out in prehistoric times from Arabia to Syria and Mesopotamia, and to have exercised a continuous influence on the development of Egyptian. The languages anciently spoken in the Highland Zone from Iran west to Asia Minor have since become extinct, except for the multitudinous dialects of the Caucasus; they have recently been lumped together as *Japhetic*, but it is doubtful whether they constitute one family.

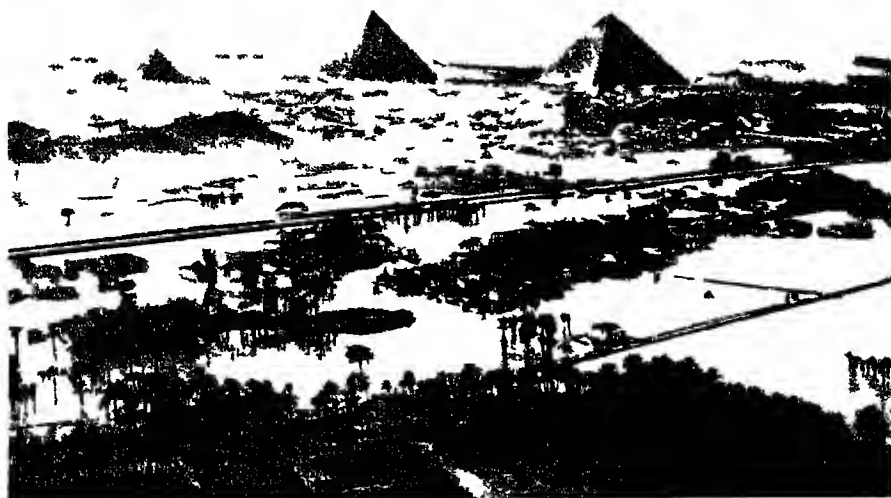
At the dawn of history (c. 3000 B.C.) the Mesopotamian communities appear to have lost touch both with the Egyptians to westward and with the Indians to

Yacmillan

# RAIN MAKING IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA







THE NILE IN FLOOD



A VILLAGE IN THE NILE VALLEY

the east. Indeed, at this date the three peoples may not have been aware of one another's existence. If there was constant intercommunication, it is difficult to understand why, for instance, they developed three quite distinct systems of writing. But at an earlier date, before the intervening deserts were so forbidding or the settlers so tightly tethered to their plots, intercourse must have been more frequent. It is thus probable that the 'birthplace of civilization' was an extensive and varied region, where diverse tribes migrated and mingled over several thousand years, exchanging the products and ideas that combined to make up the new way of life. Communities more advanced in some ways appear to have been relatively backward in others, and it is not likely that all the ingredients of the concoction were invented at any one centre. The new economy was the sum of many small experiments, to which a host of unknown pioneers must have contributed; but taken as a whole it may be regarded as having evolved over a wide stretch of the Middle East, perhaps over a wider region still.

This was not the first time in the earth's long history that the northern ice-cap had receded and the grasslands turned to barren deserts. But it was the first time that the grim challenge had been taken up by a creature with the strange gift of imagining things as other and more desirable than they are. The first step in civilization, like all the succeeding steps, was taken by the human imagination; but it was imagination working in a very material field. For the first step was the transition from seeking the food that Nature provides to moulding Nature, so that it produces the food man requires.

### *Taming the Wild*

While the effects of this economic revolution are conspicuous, its causes are obscure. It is a remarkable fact that our most valuable animal allies and our staple food-plants were domesticated, almost without exception, in prehistoric times. Either our forbears by trial and error discovered the only suitable species, or they succeeded by some special technique, or by sheer perseverance over a long period, in achieving results which the scientific breeder of today cannot yet equal.

It is certain that the pioneers in this work can have had no knowledge of the economic revolution that would result, and it is doubtful how far they were acting from strictly economic motives.

It is likely enough that animals were first tamed as pets or mascots or for sacrifice rather than for purely utilitarian purposes, some of which cannot at first have been obvious: milk and wool are by-products of domestication, too scantily produced in the wild state to be of much value. The ox may have been the *totem* of some hunting tribe, a lucky animal that could not be slaughtered except on certain ritual occasions; between such a tribe and a herd of wild oxen there might grow up such a 'free association' for mutual advantage and protection as exists between certain species in the animal world. What had been achieved accidentally with one kind of animal might be attempted deliberately with others. Tame cattle might be driven off by marauders of another tribe, who had no scruple about slaughtering them when required. And so on. This is a wide and open field for conjecture. It should be easier to say when and where the different species were first tamed, but even for this the evidence is still inadequate. The dog (whose wild original is problematic) was probably tamed late in the Old Stone Age, perhaps in Spain or North Africa. The early settlements in Mesopotamia and Egypt (before 4000 B.C.) have yielded traces of cattle, probably sprung from the aurochs of the Russian steppe, besides sheep, goats and pigs, all natives of south-western Asia, and asses, perhaps of Libyan origin. The one-humped camel, which is no longer found wild anywhere, was domesticated in Egypt before 2000 B.C., the two-humped camel and the horse in central Asia

perhaps earlier still. From about 2000 B.C. horses were used in Mesopotamia, whence they were introduced into Egypt by the Hyksos (18th Century B.C.). In America before the coming of Columbus the only domesticated animals were the sledge-dogs of the Eskimoes and Plains Indians, the llama, used as a pack-beast in Peru, the alpaca and the guinea pig, though when cattle and horses were introduced by Europeans many American peoples adapted themselves with amazing speed to the new way of life which they made possible. There is no obvious reason why the bison was never tamed by the Plains Indians or the caribou by the Eskimoes, as the closely related reindeer was tamed by the Arctic peoples of Asia and Europe. Other instances could be named of seemingly neglected opportunities, such as the failure of the Negroes to tame the African elephant.

When we turn from animals to plants, we are faced with even more perplexing problems. Men (or more probably women) have no doubt practised cultivation of a sort from very early times, replanting wild roots (as is done by the modern Bushmen and Veddas) and aiding the growth of such wild food-plants as yams and sago trees not only by spells and sacrifices but also by more efficacious activities such as weeding and watering. Here again, the aim may not always have been utilitarian nor the procedure strictly scientific: it is possible, for instance, that weeding may have originated in reverent care of a sacred plant; watering in the rain-maker's imitative magic; and sowing in the practice (current in certain Australian tribes) of puffing the seed of a wild grass from the mouth in all directions so as to achieve a magical effect of multiplication. For all we know, village communities based on a simple form of cultivation, horticultural rather than agricultural, such as are still common in tropical regions, may be fully as old as the developed hunting tribes of the Reindeer Age, perhaps even older. The big step forward came when some community that ate the seeds of wild grasses began to discover the effects of regular cultivation on the ancestors of millet, barley, wheat, rice or maize. The first three, possibly natives of Palestine, formed the economic basis of civilization in the Middle East, and traces of them have been found in the earliest settlements, together with such primitive aids to husbandry as stone hoes and sickles of wood or bone or baked clay set with flint teeth. The earliest known civilizations of India and China were also based on millet and wheat, though the cultivation of rice in the Far East must have begun very early. Maize, which was cultivated by various native peoples over a wide area centred in the Maya territory of Central America, was not introduced to Europe till the 16th Century. Indeed, all the food-plants cultivated by the American natives (except possibly the sweet potato, grown also in some Pacific islands) were wholly distinct from those of the Old World—a fact which seems to prove that agriculture, with all the consequent advances in civilization, was developed separately in the two hemispheres.

If we cannot say exactly how, when or where it happened that hunters first changed to herdsmen, or gatherers of wild herbs and seeds to gardeners and sowers, we know that in so doing they had unwittingly opened the door to new and unimagined possibilities of life. In the words of Aristotle:

‘There are many sorts of food, and therefore there are many ways of life, both of beasts and of men; they cannot live without food, and differences in their food have made differences in their way of life.’ (*Politics*, I, p. 1256.

Food-gatherers cannot easily form a permanent settlement in one place; but, though usually on the move, they cannot travel fast and have seldom any inducement to travel far. In contrast, the typical peasant is tied to the seasonal round of toil on his plot of land, year in, year out, from generation to generation. He is the most permanent feature in the human landscape. On the other hand, to quote further from Aristotle:

'The most leisured class of men are herdsmen (*nomades*), for they get their food from tame beasts without toil: their flocks have to wander from place to place for the sake of pasturage, and they must follow, cultivating a sort of living farm.'

In parts of central Asia the summer pastures in the mountains and the winter pastures in the plains are hundreds of miles apart. In semi-desert regions the herbage is so thin that a flock must needs graze over a very wide area, for ever roving from oasis to oasis. Where the herdsman has learnt to travel on or behind camel, donkey or horse, he acquires a mobility quite new in human history.

When Adam was driven out of the Garden where he had gathered the fruits of the earth without labour, his sons were Cain, the tiller of the ground, and Abel, the keeper of flocks. In the story as told by the descendants of the herdsman Abraham, Cain slew Abel; in actual history it was more often (or at least more conspicuously) Abel who slew or oppressed Cain. The quarrel between these two, with their sharply contrasted modes of life, has been one of the driving forces of history.

Certain peoples have combined the two modes in various ways. For cultivators who had not yet discovered the use of manure or the rotation of crops, it was almost a necessity to move on each year and sow the new crop in virgin soil. This practice persisted even in Europe till the 1st Century B.C., when the German tribes were still partly migratory; in some regions it persists to this day. In upland country there is an opening for dairy farmers, who till a patch of soil in the valley but depend mainly on their flocks and may have to move up into summer cottages (*shielings*) when the beasts are grazing on the higher slopes. On the edge of the great deserts or grasslands we continually find pastoral peoples yielding, like the ancient Israelites, to the attractions of a more settled life. Down to last century, at any rate, the Haddendoa herdsmen of the Sudan (better known as the Fuzzy Wuzzies) used to sow millet in the Nile mud when the summer floods had subsided and then settle in rudimentary villages till harvest time, after which they resumed their nomadic life. The first settlements of the ancient Egyptians may have begun in much the same way. But in the main the wandering nomad and the settled peasant (who may also keep a few beasts on his farm) present two distinct types.

### *Nomadic Tribes*

From the earliest recorded times the nomadic 'Sand-dwellers' of the Sahara and Arabian Deserts figure as turbulent neighbours of the Nile valley and Mesopotamia. There is, however, no direct archaeological evidence of the existence of nomads (in the strict sense of migratory herdsmen) as early as the first agricultural settlements, and it is questionable whether they could subsist without occasional intercourse with such settlements.

The nomad leaves few footprints on the sands of time. He folds up his tent like the Arabs and as silently steals away, leaving very little on his camp-site to enlighten the archaeologist. His property consists almost wholly of livestock and their products—tools and weapons originally of bone, skin clothing, skin tents, skin vessels for milk and water. To less portable possessions his attitude is that of the Border cattle-reiver whom the sight of a fine plump haystack moved only to an expression of regret that it had not four legs to it. Failing four legs, two will do. Wives and children also are fairly portable assets. A thriving herd multiplies so quickly that extra cow-hands or milk-maids are welcome; they are not, as among the hunting peoples, only so many extra mouths to fill. The man with many cattle will gladly part with a few for an extra wife. Now that they have a market value, females are no longer strangled at birth. Hence (having a

lower death rate) they easily come to outnumber the males, while at the same time becoming individually less important. Cattle-breeding is man's work, and in the chief interests of the herdsman's life (as every reader of Wild West fiction knows) women are rather out of place. Their talents have little scope. Nomadic peoples, therefore, tend to be organized in polygamous *patriarchal* families. In theory at least, the patriarch is boss of his womenfolk and also of his sons. The animals belong to him, and he can cut off a rebellious son with a curse or sacrifice his life, as Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac—who had obviously been brought up in the habit of obedience. Slavery also is now economically possible, though the slaves in such a community are generally treated very much like the members of the family.

The typical nomad, as he meets us in *Genesis* or in the pages of Doughty or Lawrence, is rather an attractive fellow, with a certain large generosity and a grave nobility of demeanour. He is emphatically a gentleman—partly at least because he is a gentleman of leisure. He is reasonably well fed and yet has plenty of spare time on his hands. He spends a good deal of it in meditation. Even in Britain today the shepherd strikes us as something of a philosopher, one who rises above the rush and bustle of life. He is perhaps a bit of a poet, like King David or the Ettrick Shepherd. And he is often profoundly religious, retaining in his worship, as in his whole mode of life, a large measure of the *primaeva* simplicity. As the nomad is not specially attached to certain places, so his deities are generally not so much local as tribal. And the god of the tribe is conceived as a patriarch, a father commanding absolute obedience. Often he is also the god of the sun or the wide vault of heaven, an ever-present companion to the wanderer over open grassland or desert.

One nomad may be richer than another in flocks and herds. But there is always a risk that his wealth (like that of Job) may be lost in a day. It has not the solidity of wealth based on landed property, which can scarcely develop except in an agricultural society. There is thus little distinction of classes among nomads, and elaborate social or political organizations do not easily develop. The nomad is bound by no sense of solidarity with his neighbours. Indeed, like the Londoner, he has no neighbours. On the other hand, he is strongly bound by ties of kinship. He may remember his pedigree on the father's side through a score of generations. The family during the life of the father remains closely united; after his death the sons may drift apart, but the sense of unity remains. The clan system, with its accompaniment of blood feuds, is generally in full force. And, unlike the food-gatherer, the nomad has both the leisure and the motive for going out of his way to attack strangers. A raid on a party belonging to a rival clan may be a profitable venture, bringing in rich booty of beasts, women and slaves; and a raid on a settlement of village-folk may be no less profitable. Moreover, as Aristotle again noted:

'A pastoral people is the best trained for war, sturdy in physique and used to camping out.' (*Politics*, I, p. 1319.)

The historic role of the nomad as warrior and conqueror has been described with remarkable insight by an Arab historian.

'In order to win a livelihood, the nomadic peoples devote themselves to the care of their camels; their sole task is to find pasturage for them and to cause them to multiply. They have had perforce to adopt the wild life of the desert because this region is the only one that affords these animals the scrub on which they feed and sandy places on which they can drop their young. Though it be a place of want and hunger, they become inured to it

and breed a new generation to whom the endurance of starvation and hardship has become a second nature. . . .

'They shun the troops to whom established governments entrust the safeguarding of their frontiers and scorn to shelter behind the walls and gates of cities. Strong enough to defend themselves, they never entrust the burden of their defence to others. Always under arms, they display on their razzias the utmost vigilance. . . . To guard their camps against outside enemies, each tribe has its band of picked warriors and youths distinguished by their valour. But this band would never be strong enough to fend off attack if it were not united by membership of one family and inspired by a communal spirit. . . . The henchmen and retainers of a great man may also be reckoned among his kinsfolk . . . for they are bound by ties almost as strong as those of blood. . . .

'As a settled life is favourable to civilization, so a nomadic life is the reverse. If the Arabs need stones to prop their cooking-pots, they pull down walls to get them; if they need wood for pickets or tent-poles, they demolish house-roofs. By the very nature of their lives they are enemies of building, which is the first step in civilization. . . . They are of all peoples the least submissive. Their half-savage life has begotten a rudeness, a pride and a jealousy of temper which sets them against all authority. Only when they heed the religious teaching of a prophet or a saint are their hearts filled with the power that keeps them in the right path; their haughty and jealous temper is softened and they are led into concord and obedience. Their readiness to receive this teaching springs from the very simplicity of their nature, which is not corrupted by bad habits and has never acquired contemptible qualities. . . .

'Since conquests are achieved only by dash and daring, a people accustomed to the nomadic life and the rough manners engendered by the desert can readily conquer a more civilized people, even though the latter be more numerous and equally strong in communal spirit. . . . Having no country where they live in the enjoyment of plenty, they have no tie to bind them to their birthplace. All lands alike seem good to them. Not content with lordship among their own folk and over their neighbours, they overpass the bounds of their country to invade distant lands and subdue their inhabitants. . . .

'The new empire first passes through a period in which the conquerors guard the usages of the roving life. But this is soon followed by ease and comfort. . . . They are attracted by rich foods, clothing, houses and furnishings. One sort of luxury leads to another, till the habits of the settled life replace those of the nomadic life and the conquerors model themselves on their conquered predecessors.' (Ibn Khaldūn of Tunis [1332-1406]: *Prolegomena to History*, Bk. I, Section 2, pp. 229-309 [Extracts based on French version by M. de Slane, 1934].)

Before the art of war was transformed by European science, these barbarian nomads, though not very numerous, were a perpetual menace to their more civilized neighbours. Normally they were too independent to combine for any large-scale design of conquest: it was not easy to exact military or other service from men whom it might not even be possible to find. Now and then, however, there would arise among them a robber chief with the genius of Attila or Jenghis Khan or the Zulu Chaka, able to unite warring clans into a headlong horde which swept all before it. His followers would establish themselves as a military aristocracy among a subject people; but, by doing so, they speedily lost the very qualities to which they owed their triumph. Even the Arab power, firmly grounded

though it was on the unifying faith of Islam, survived only as the heir of older civilizations. And the same is true of its many precursors. The nomad may invigorate older cultures with a breath of fresh air, a freer and simpler outlook less hidebound by taboos; but his conquests, more often than not, melt away as they have been achieved, with the speed of a cavalry charge. The enduring fabrics of history are built only on the bowed shoulders of the peasant, stooping over spade or plough.

### *Peasant Villages*

The plough-boy is a less romantic figure than the cow-boy, but he has a bigger record of achievement. The amazingly persistent civilization of China is deeply rooted in the 'Good Earth'. And the whole history of Rome's empire-building is in the story of Cincinnatus, called from the plough to be dictator in an hour of deadly peril, defeating the Aequians in one day and returning on the morrow to the plough—an example to all future dictators.

The life of the husbandman differs from that of the food-gatherer far more widely than does the nomadic life, and its potentialities of further development are immeasurably richer and more varied. The mere change to a predominantly starchy diet must have worked on the human body in ways whose ultimate effects remain incalculable. Children, in particular, must have benefited enormously.<sup>1</sup> More striking consequences followed when the peasant adopted a fixed abode. This probably happened first in the great River Valleys. Here the fertility of the soil was annually renewed by alluvial deposits, and at the same time the amount of cultivable land was limited and wild game (which at first offered an alternative or supplementary livelihood) must soon have become scarce. Here before 5000 B.C. the windbreak became transformed into a house, the encampment into a village. In his house, even if it were only a log cabin or a wattle-and-daub hut, man (and still more woman) could accumulate property—all such furnishings and receptacles and appliances and toys as inventive ingenuity might suggest. These things might become heirlooms. And there are other less tangible heirlooms—traditions centred in hearth and home and the familiar landmarks of the neighbourhood. Household gods and the guardian spirits of field or spring usurp the honours of tribal ancestors and totems. New problems and loyalties arise. How is the land and water supply to be allotted? What am I to do if my duty to my kinsman conflicts with my duty to my neighbour? Gradually the tribal community of kinsmen gives way to the village community of neighbours, holding the land in common or sharing it out, evenly or unevenly. Here in embryo is the territorial state of today.

The embryo grows rapidly. It is now possible, as never before, for population to increase. The mother need not carry her infant on her back through long days' marches. Children at a very tender age can be made to pay their way by scaring birds, driving pigs or weeding crops; big families become an asset, not a liability. Moreover, a given area will now support 10 times, perhaps 100 times, its former population. There come to be far more people in the world, and each individual is brought into contact with a greater number. Peasants tend to congregate in villages for safety, and because field-work, no less than hunting, can often be better done in co-operation, and because man on the whole is a sociable species. There is a natural limit to the size of a purely agricultural community. the cultivated area on which it subsists cannot conveniently be increased beyond a radius of three or four miles without unduly lengthening the distance the peasant has to walk before and after his day's work (though he may camp out in the

<sup>1</sup> An Eskimo mother is obliged to suckle her young for as much as four years, and even so there is a very heavy mortality among newly weaned children when they are switched over to a diet of whale blubber.

fields in the busiest seasons). In exceptionally fertile soil, such as that of Egypt, villages can be larger than elsewhere.

It is not necessary that all this increased population should devote itself to the work of cultivation. Where conditions are favourable, the labour of one man on the land can feed ten. If one man has a special aptitude for some other job which the community acknowledges to be useful—say making agricultural implements or reciting charms—he can give his whole time to this and trade his skill for some of the surplus food. The specialist or professional man has made his first appearance, and with him the trader, who exchanges these special products between man and man, and even between village and village.

These professions would soon tend to become hereditary, because the special knowledge would be guarded as a valuable family secret, and particular types of ability (or *mana*) would come to be regarded, with some justification, as confined to particular families. There are instances in isolated communities where useful arts (for instance, the art of boat-building in certain Pacific islands) have died out with the family that knew the right procedure, especially the right magic. When these specialized classes are firmly established, some inevitably acquire more wealth and prestige than others, and the social equality of the food-gatherers is at an end.

There are easier ways of getting a share of the surplus produce than by earning it. You can just take it. There is an opening here for the gangster—possibly the leader of a neighbouring band of nomads. Perhaps the village will submit to pay blackmail or tribute to this racketeer; perhaps it will organize a force in its own defence under a capable leader. Either way, the soldier and the despot are coming into being. To this military power the only serious counterpoise is magical or priestly power, which we shall consider later.

The husbandman, meanwhile, has been changing in his inner life no less than in his outer. He is no longer an irresponsible child, living only in the present. At seed-time he must plan for the harvest; at harvest he must save some seed for the next sowing. He may even plant trees of which he can never hope to gather the fruit. The alternation of the seasons becomes the dominant factor in his life. He learns to think ahead, to avoid risks, to work far harder than he need, above all to hoard like a squirrel. So we find the typical peasant a man of untiring industry, prudent, thrifty, narrow (his thoughts being concentrated in a small field), inclined to be hard and grasping, somewhat given to grumbling, but withal infinitely patient—the tortoise who beats the hare in the long run.

Man's first setting up house was an even more momentous event for his wife. Agriculture was probably woman's invention and in its primitive form, where it still depends on the hoe or the digging-stick (the ancestor of the plough), it often remains woman's work. Men may even be debarred from it, as a department of the female mystery of fruitfulness. So, when the male activity of hunting has dwindled away, the man may find himself in the enviable position of a drone, a hanger-on dependent on his wife's labour. A community of this type tends to be, if not strictly matriarchal, at least *matrilineal* (reckoning descent through the female line). Correspondingly, its chief deity is normally a Mother Goddess, associated with the earth or the moon, and attended by a more vaguely conceived male figure who sometimes plays the double role of consort and son.

While this type of society has left its mark in the area of the ancient civilizations (notably in Asia Minor), these appear, in the main, to have grown out of a *patrilineal* society. We may guess that they were products of an early fusion of agricultural and pastoral communities, in which the herdsmen had brought in their cattle (tended by men rather than women) to lighten the labour of the fields and their Sun God to outshine the Moon Goddess. So in Egypt, at the dawn of history, the heaviest field-work was done by men, driving ox-drawn ploughs as



their descendants do to this day, and the Sun God had begun to stand out above a menagerie of tribal totems.

The liberation of woman from field-work left her more freedom to develop the domestic arts. She must probably be credited with many of the improvements commonly found associated with agriculture. From the plaiting of rushes and twigs she developed the wicker hut and the wicker basket. By adding clay she turned the one into a rainproof house, the other into a pot that would hold water. Probably the oldest fragment of pottery so far discovered is a lump of baked clay from an Old Stone Age site in East Africa which had evidently been plastered on the inside of a basket; and from the shape and ornamentation of the oldest earthenware of Egypt we may infer that it was copied from wickerwork. Presumably it was women also who passed from twisting yarn to spinning thread and weaving it into cloth. Spindle whorls found in prehistoric sites in Egypt and Mesopotamia show that the settlers already excelled those Australian natives who make thread by rolling fibres together on their bare thighs. To the credit of the male sex may be set most of that multitude of wooden gadgets which have been invented to supply the new needs of the settled peasant. Probably most of these labour-saving devices, like those of today, did anything but save labour. But they certainly gave a fuller outlet to the creative and artistic impulses, the human desire to make things and especially to make patterns. Life was becoming more comfortable and less adventurous. To the orderly man, at any rate, and the tidy-minded woman, the new life must have been far pleasanter than the old.

### *The Mystery of Fruitfulness*

If we could visit one of these clusters of mud huts that had sprung up by the banks of Nile or Euphrates some 7,000 years ago, we should certainly find that the villager who helped to till a patch of soil, watered and fertilized by the river floods, was better fed, better clothed and better sheltered than his food-gathering ancestors. But it is most unlikely that we should find him enjoying his new comforts with a rational appreciation of their causes and their potentialities. Rather we must picture him thinking old thoughts in a new world, bewildered (as we are today) in the face of his new inventions, bound faster than ever by the new complexity of life in a web of magical performances and taboos. From the similarity of the seemingly useless beliefs and practices current among agricultural peoples all the world over, as set out in the weighty volumes of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, it is fair to assume that men devised them at the very beginning of cultivation; certainly they are older than our oldest records. Underlying them all seems to be the realization that human life depends on the mysterious growth of the crops. As the nursery rhyme says:

Can you, or I, or anyone know  
How oats and beans and barley grow?

Many savages seem to think they know the answer to this conundrum. If we attempt to make sense of the strange customs in which that answer is expressed, we feel at first as though we were lost in a fantastic labyrinth from which no path leads out into the sunlit world of objective experience. Yet, if we follow such clues as we have found to the thought of prehistoric man, we may attempt a conjectural short-cut which will link the nightmare world of savage imagining with familiar elements in our civilized human nature.

The first cultivators had not only to change the whole routine of their outward lives but to accomplish the no less difficult feat of adjusting their minds to the change. Men who had lived from hand to mouth had now to co-operate in performing laborious tasks of no obvious or immediate utility, accepting some common authority who could proclaim, 'Today you must begin to dig', or, 'At

the next new moon you must begin to sow.' They did not understand why in some years the harvest was good, in others there was famine. They did not particularly want to understand if it involved intellectual effort. They wanted a *Führer*—an issuer of precise orders, a focus and safety-valve of communal emotion, if need be a scapegoat—someone who would tell them what to do and take the blame if it went wrong. Naturally the man who stepped into this breach was the community's chief magician, the traditional exploiter of their wants and fears.

The magician was the repository of such scientific knowledge as the community possessed, perhaps the pioneer in new discoveries. So in the Kenyah villages of Borneo, for instance, agricultural operations are directed by the village weather prophet, who foretells the season for sowing rice by measuring the shadow cast by an upright pole. He takes care, however, to surround this simple and scientific procedure with an aura of mystery whose secrets are hidden even from the chief.

Among many peoples, particularly in Africa, the magician claims not only to predict the coming of the rains that herald the sowing season but actually to produce them. Towards the close of the dry season he performs a mysterious ceremony, a blend of imitative magic and sacrifice to the rain spirit, which is believed to ensure rainfall and the consequent renewal of pasture and crops. If the rain spirit does not play up, the magician has to pay dearly for his pretensions. A native informant, representing the Bari tribes of the White Nile, explained:

'If we were not afraid of you British, we would kill the rain-maker. When the rain falls, then we do not kill. When the sun shines strongly, then we kill.'

Among the Dinka tribes, who are northern neighbours of the Bari, the rain-maker has attained a more assured authority. He is the 'spear-chief', whose spear is not only a magician's wand but is on the way to become a royal sceptre. Although he may be assumed to represent the older stratum of the population, the conquered Negro agriculturalists, he takes precedence over the 'cattle-chief', who commands in war and other secular affairs and evidently represents the nomadic conquerors. To maintain his power in the face of professional rivalry, he must make good use of his wits. One ingenious practitioner, who professed to gain his knowledge by consulting a tame lion, had to yield the palm to a ventriloquist, whose oracular lion had the advantage of being invisible. Yet, with all this trickery, the Dinka rain-makers evidently take quite seriously their pretension to embody an ancestral spirit with special life-giving powers, whose death would be a public calamity. For, when they feel their powers failing, they order their own ceremonial slaughter. They take the food of the community into the grave with them, in the form of a handful of millet and a handful of milk, or even a slaughtered bullock. After an interval the spirit or power is released from the grave and reincarnated in another member of the family.

Downstream again from the Dinka are the Shilluk. These are similarly grouped in tribes, each with its distinctive totem, but the tribes are all united under the authority of a single king. One of the king's chief functions is to superintend the annual rain-making ceremony, and until recently his tenure of office was subject to the same limitation as that of the Dinka rain-makers. It was believed that, with the failing of his power, the crops and cattle and the human population would also fail and die. He was therefore ceremonially slain, to an

<sup>1</sup> C. Z. and B. G. Seligmann. *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* [1932], p. 281 n.

accompaniment of animal and human sacrifices, and after an interregnum of about a year a mysterious rite was performed to discover to which of his kinsfolk the royal virtues had been transferred.

If we pursue our journey down the Nile for another 2,000 miles and travel backward through time for some 5,000 years, we reach another kingdom, organized on somewhat similar lines. For Ancient Egypt also was formed by the union of several totemic tribes, and its king was similarly credited with supernatural power over the weather and the crops. After he had reigned for a certain period, he renewed this vital power by celebrating a sort of jubilee, which has been interpreted as a symbolic substitute for ritual death.

Without pressing these and other resemblances too far, we can find many indications that the isolated communities of the Upper Nile have preserved early stages in a historical sequence, from village magician to Divine King, which had reached its climax in the Lower Nile valley at the dawn of history. Though the evidence from Egypt is the oldest and clearest we possess, we cannot be sure that the whole sequence of institutions and ideas originated there. We can only say, with a fair degree of probability, that, as and when men developed that rudimentary civilization which agriculture made possible, they normally grouped themselves in communities held together by obedience to an individual—call him magician, priest, king, or god incarnate—whom they held responsible for their common welfare. Even in America, whether by diffusion of ideas across the oceans or by 'parallel cultural evolution', they followed a strikingly similar line of development. As Montaigne observes, with a sidelong glance at European monarchs and their flatterers:

'Those of Mexico, after the ceremonies of the king's consecration, dare no more look him in the face; but, as if by his royalty they had deified him, they afterwards deem him to be a god. Amongst the oaths which they make him swear to maintain their religion, to keep their laws, to defend their liberties, to be valiant, just and debonaire, he is also sworn to make the sun march in his accustomed light; in time of need to cause the clouds shower down their waters; to enforce rivers to run in their right wonted channels; and compel the earth to produce all necessary things for his people.'<sup>1</sup>

It requires no great insight into everyday human nature to understand how the humble figure of the magician, once installed in his perilous office, might gradually become invested with the pomp and circumstance of royalty. The simple explanation of his functions as leader and scapegoat would satisfy neither him nor his followers. It was essential to the effective working of the drama that its central figure should be felt by all parties to be something apart from common humanity—a being who generated magical efficacy or *mana* by all that he did, not least by his dying. The people would feel that in exalting him they were glorifying themselves; and their credulity would tempt him both to elaborate and to believe his own fairy-tales. Our generation, which has seen the process at work in the most highly educated nation of Europe, can understand how irresistibly it must have warped the growth of relatively untutored minds.

The figure of the 'rain-maker' or 'life-giver' has been variously fitted by different peoples into their different versions of that general picture of life and the world which men have painted and repainted throughout the ages in the sober hues of experience and the gaudier but less durable tints of fancy. He embodied the life of the community; if he fell ill, they felt themselves threatened with extinction. He also embodied the life of their food-plant, which was their

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, iii, 8. Cf. Gomara: *Conquest of Mexico*, fol. 306. Cf. also the modern belief in 'King's weather', or (conversely) the attitude of the harassed housewife who blames the Prime Minister when the fire refuses to light

life. His death and burial put new life into the soil—a widespread connexion of ideas, implied in such customs as that of the Khands of India, who used to fertilize the harvest fields each year with the blood of a human victim. In a still wider sense he embodied that cycle of birth and death and rebirth that makes up the life of all Nature. He could be pictured as a god of vegetation or the changing seasons: his death was winter, and spring was his rebirth in a successor. Then, as the figure of the Dying God grew clearer in the public imagination, it could be partly or wholly detached from the human figure of the rain-maker or king. The human ruler became the earthly representative of the god—his son, his priest, if need be his sacrificial victim—but without ceasing to be still in some sense the god himself.

Such was the ruler in the oldest civilizations known to us. In historical times the tendency has been, on the whole, towards a reluctant recognition that the king, though he may rule by divine right, is after all a mere mortal. But the stately robe of ritual and myth that men had woven around him was not discarded simply because it ceased to fit the wearer. In face of the mystery of life and death, men still craved reassurance. As they had formerly dramatized the uncertainties and triumphs of the hunt in ritual dances that strengthened the sense of fellowship with one another and with wild nature, so now they dramatized the expectancy of seed-time and the jubilation of harvest. In the ceremonies attending the death and rebirth of the Vegetation God they found not only a theme for the drama but a new outlet for the religious impulse—a hope that they too might share in the seasonal renewal of all life. With a conviction begotten not of experience but of the compelling power of collective emotion, they believed that they had found a key to the preservation of the life of the community and even to the prolongation of their own individual lives beyond the grave. This conviction, jealously guarded and revealed like other tribal wisdom only to the initiate, was the inmost secret of those sacred Mysteries (Greek *mysteria*) that comforted the common people throughout the ancient civilizations and coloured the thought even of the prophets and sages who repudiated them.

This rough sketch must serve to round off our picture of the primitive village. Besides the run of peasants and their wives, it already contained, as described in our first chapter, a few specialized craftsmen and traders and a composite figure who is the prototype of doctor, squire and parson. It is easy to depict the magician or chief priest as the villain of our tale, using his superior intelligence to terrify and deceive in the interest of his own precarious authority, working on men's feelings with the aid of music, drugs and hypnotism, and smothering the vague simplicity of primitive religion in a welter of horrific superstitions. His was indeed the guiding influence, in so far as there was one, at a stage in men's social development when their struggle towards a better life seemed more than ever drawn into channels where it could only defeat itself. In their search for economic security they had resorted to robbery, slave-raiding and organized warfare. In their search for spiritual security they became bogged in a morass of groundless terrors which found expression in such perverse activities as ritual cannibalism, head-hunting and human sacrifice. Yet these very injustices and absurdities, by providing a not too easy social environment, may have acted as a spur to further development. Moreover, the existence of a leisured class, engaged in performances with no immediate utilitarian end in view, may have led to discoveries that would never have been made by practical men immersed in the daily needs of life.

### *From Village to Empire*

We cannot say how long the village community persisted as the most complex form of social organization. It was an intensely conservative institution, which

in large tracts of Asia and Africa appears to have changed very little in thousands of years. Yet, like all human institutions, it contained the seeds of change. Men of genius arose here and there; new contrivances were invented, new thoughts expressed. One community brought others under its sway and collected a share of their surplus food under the name of tribute. Here the population could grow beyond the limits imposed by the productivity of the immediate neighbourhood. Craftsmen settled here in numbers and lived by exporting their wares in return for country produce brought in by farmers to market. The village was growing into a town.

In some regions (notably the coastlands and islands of the Mediterranean) the town developed into the city—an independent political unit but dependent economically on the free exchange of its specialized products for the specialties of foreign territories. Eventually these communities were all absorbed by military conquest into larger political units—kingdoms or empires. In the older centres of civilization this happened not only at an earlier date (before 2000 B.C. in Mesopotamia and before 3000 B.C. in the Nile valley) but at an earlier stage in the political and economic development of the component units.

A kingdom such as Egypt was a cluster of village and urban communities. Here a certain amount of exchange went on between peasant and craftsman, either direct at market and fair or through specialized merchants. But a large part of the economic activity consisted in the compulsory inward flow of goods and services as tribute from the villagers to the local and central authorities and the corresponding outward flow in which at the bidding of authority they were redistributed. In this process the products of labour were most unequally apportioned; but even the poorest peasant received, in return for his contribution, the protection of an organized military power and some small share in the products of specialized craftsmanship. These were also in a sense products of the organized power, since without it the whole system of distribution would have been in constant danger of breaking down. The ruler who could collect the surplus food production from the largest area could maintain not only the strongest army but the greatest number and variety of specialists, ranging from masons and jewellers to physicians and poets. At the centre of a powerful monarchy the degree of specialization and the level of craftsmanship could reach new heights. The central authority also directed large-scale public works and stimulated the economic ebb and flow by fixing common standards for measuring quantities and standard weights of some rare metal as a measure of value, though it was long before this currency circulated so widely as to put an end to payments in kind.

Such in outline was the economic structure of the ancient river valley civilizations. In order to make it work, men required a command of material resources far beyond the needs of the village community. In particular, as soon as they began to congregate in towns, they felt the need for some means of shifting goods in bulk by land or water and for new materials, tougher and more plastic than stone, from which they could fashion specialized tools to supply the more varied wants of the privileged town-dwellers. Rudimentary canoes and rafts must have been in use in the Old Stone Age. Before 3000 B.C. sailing ships were ploughing the waters of the Nile and the Mediterranean and probably also of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. By this date wheeled wagons were jolting over the trackways of Mesopotamia and India, though apparently Egypt had only pack animals and sledges till after 2000 B.C. And, soon after the beginning of the New Stone Age, stone began to give place for many purposes to metal.

Gold, which is found as a pure metal in nature, must have been early coveted for its beauty and durability; but it is of little practical use. Its high value among all civilized peoples is apparently due to an ancient superstition, which prized it as a life-preserver. Copper seldom occurs except in ores, from which, however,

it is easily separated by heat. Copper implements, made by hammering the metal into shape, were used in Egypt soon after 5000 B.C. Soon it was discovered that the molten metal could be run into a cast, and then (before 3000 B.C. in Mesopotamia) it was alloyed with tin to form the much harder metal bronze. The process of smelting iron, though it seems to have been known in Mesopotamia before 2000 B.C., was not practised on a big scale till the 13th Century, when the Iron Age with its abundance of cheap metal tools and weapons was inaugurated by the Hittites.

Thanks to these major improvements in handicraft and innumerable minor ones, man had attained, a few centuries before 3000 B.C., in Egypt and Mesopotamia and probably also in the Indus Valley, to a mastery of his environment which made possible the growth of towns and empires. But in order to civilize men in the etymological sense—to make them 'civil' or 'fit to be citizens'—it is not enough just to herd them into a town and satisfy their material needs. Town life demands among other things centralized authority, acting through deputies who obey and are obeyed, and this is hardly possible on a large scale without the invention of writing. It demands more elaborate regulations governing such varied subjects as property rights and sanitation. It demands mathematical knowledge applicable to surveying and architecture and the distribution of provisions. It demands a certain tolerance of original thought, without which none of these revolutionary inventions could have been conceived or developed. But above all, and hardest of all, it demands co-operation not only for constructive activities but also for mutual defence, since the communities that made most progress in the arts of peace formed the most tempting prey for less thriving neighbours or for predatory nomads. We may see no reason why men should not have learnt to co-operate entirely by a reasonable process of mutual agreement and give-and-take. Actually, the lesson was not driven into them without the aid of those most unreasonable agents, war and superstition, the enslavement of human bodies and minds. Behind man's oldest civilizations lies the tradition of wars of conquest and extermination and even darker memories of bloody sacrifice and the 'abominations of the heathen'. These things left their scars. But the work had been accomplished. Large bodies of men had been brought to live and work together; an orderly framework had been built up, a framework cemented by human reason and sociability as well as by brute force and superstitious terror. The problem before men ever since has been to hold this framework together and at the same time to strengthen the cement of reason and fellow-feeling till they can dispense with its soul-destroying auxiliary fear, which is always threatening to shatter the fabric it has helped to build.

But, if civilization has not yet brought men the safety and happiness they sought, it has brought certain unforeseen rewards. A modern anthropologist's remark that 'in his effort to save his own life, man all unwittingly created civilization'<sup>1</sup> was anticipated in the more pregnant words of Aristotle: 'the city came into being for the sake of life; it is for the sake of good life'. Man's further quest for this 'good life', along different but sometimes almost parallel routes, will occupy the remainder of this book. Those nameless pioneers, who made this quest a possibility, have been blent in the traditions of most civilized peoples into one legendary 'culture hero'. Their achievements (including some of the accompanying errors) are summarized in the words which Aeschylus (c. 460 B.C.) puts into the mouth of the Greek 'culture hero' Prometheus (*Forethought*), who had incurred the vengeance of the gods by imparting to men a share of the divine monopoly of fire and raising their life from the level of the brutes to rivalry with the Immortals:

<sup>1</sup> Sir G. Elliot Smith: *Human History* [1930], p. 33. Cf. below, p. 243.

Of old like phantoms of a dream  
Men lived ears had they, but nought heard;  
Eyes had they, but their world was blurred  
To a dull round of things that seem

They built no sunny homes of clay,  
No craft of carpentry was theirs  
Like dwarfish ants they digged their lairs  
In caverns buried from the day

No sign in heaven spoke to them  
Of coming winter or spring flowers  
Or autumn fruitage, all their hours,  
Ungessed, unmarked, went as they came

Till I raised up their eyes to tell  
The rising and the setting star  
And, chief of all sciences that are,  
I taught them number's magic spell

Nor less the clerkly art I taught  
Of adding figured sign to sign,  
Sage mother of the Muses nine,  
Memory of all, strong tool of thought

I harnessed first the ox and laid  
The burden of the yoke and pack,  
Man's heaviest load upon his back,  
And at the chariot's shaft I bade

The prancing steed obey the rein,  
The rich man's emblem and his boast,  
And I the first launched from the coast  
The sail winged chariots of the main

For wretches wasted with disease,  
In balm and drench and drug untaught,  
Compounds of kindly cures I wrought,  
'Gainst every ill sure remedies

I taught what ominous signs forebode,  
Which dreams spake true and which have lied,  
What truths a random word may hide  
Or chance encounter by the road

I flights of crook clawed fowl made plain,  
Propitious some, some sinister,  
Their strifes and loves, their haviour,  
And their conjunctures not in vain

Entails by smoothness or by sheen,  
Liver and gall grown right or wry,  
I told how these may signify  
The pleasure of the Powers Unseen

What wisdom lurks in fat-swathed limb  
Or long loin burnt in sacrifice,  
Thus I made clear I opened eyes  
On fiery signs, afortune dim

I showed what treasures earth concealed,  
Copper and iron, silver, gold  
In a brief word my tale is told  
All arts Prometheus hath revealed <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Prometheus Bound*, 456-515

## V

## A SURVEY OF THE WORLD IN THE 20TH CENTURY B.C.: EGYPT

*The Social Pyramid*

TO the Western mind there is something about the imposing façade of the ancient Oriental civilizations, especially that of Egypt, at once alluring and repellent. Greek philosophers sought in the 'brutish gods of Nile' a key to the inmost secrets of the universe; and later seekers after wisdom have treated the Great Pyramid as an appendix to the Book of Revelation. But, if the writings of the Egyptian scribes have yielded up their meaning aright, the inscrutable Sphinx broods over no darker mystery than this: that human nature 5,000 years ago was a very human patchwork of sympathy and callousness, patience and intolerance, cleverness and credulity. And doubtless it would be quite feasible to prove the superiority of modern science to the proverbial wisdom of the Egyptians by setting the unemployed to work on a bigger and better pyramid.<sup>1</sup>

Our knowledge of Egyptian history is still, and is likely to remain, very patchy. A body of traditions, including chronological lists of rulers, was preserved by the priests, and scraps of it have survived in the works of Greek historians, notably in the fragments of the *History* written in Greek by the Egyptian priest Manetho (c. 270 B.C.). From these, supplemented by the much more reliable evidence of contemporary inscriptions and material remains, it is possible to construct a shadowy outline with a few bright patches surprisingly full of detail. We have been favoured by the almost rainless climate, in which even the most perishable objects have sometimes survived for thousands of years, and by the multifarious paraphernalia with which the Egyptians equipped the rock-built or rock-hewn resting-places of the dead. Of the flimsy mud-brick dwelling-places of the living few traces remain. The houses were designed to last a few years, but the tombs were built for eternity.

Manetho divides Egyptian history into 31 dynasties, beginning with the legendary Menes and concluding with the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. During the *Predynastic Period*, known only from legend and archaeology, a score of warring states in the Nile valley proper (Upper Egypt) and as many in the Delta region (Lower Egypt) gradually coalesced into two kingdoms, in which they long preserved their individuality as provinces (*nomes*) with their own cults and their own emblems, perhaps representing the *totems* of prehistoric clans. Lower Egypt, probably owing to its more varied foreign contacts, was at first the seat of a more advanced civilization. 'Menes', however, reigned in the Upper Kingdom before a victorious career made him the first ruler of a united Egypt. While many of his successors are mere names to us, others are known from numerous monuments. Three periods stand out clearly, distinguished by Egyptologists as the *Old Kingdom* (Dynasties III-VI), the *Middle Kingdom* (Dynasties XI-XIII) and the *New Kingdom* (Dynasties XVIII-XX). During the Old Kingdom, Egypt reached a level of material civilization never afterwards surpassed, which has left imperishable memorials in the stupendous pyramids of the Fourth Dynasty. At this time also the structure of Egyptian society became fixed in the shape that it was to retain, with minor modification, till the priesthoods succumbed to the Christian Church—a shape that may also be fitly described as a pyramid, with the peasantry at the base and *Pharaoh* (literally the 'Great House' or 'Palace') at the top. The Middle Kingdom, on the other hand, was apparently the golden

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the War. R. Engelbach (in *The Legacy of Egypt* [1942], p. 126) seriously suggests that the building of the Great Pyramid was partly designed as a cure for unemployment in an age of rapidly expanding productivity and population.



age of Egyptian literature and culture in general. The energy of the New Kingdom was absorbed in wars of conquest abroad; it paid the penalty in a certain coarsening, noticeable both in literature and in art, except during the brilliant interlude of the heretic king Akhenaten. Thereafter there was a last flicker of the old civilization under the Saite kings (Dynasty XXVI). The dates of these dynasties are established with a high degree of probability by astronomical evidence as far back as the beginning of the New Kingdom about 1575 B.C. Earlier dates are conjectural, but it is most commonly held that the Middle Kingdom began shortly before 2000 B.C. and the Old Kingdom not long after 3000; that fixes 'Menes' about 3200 B.C.

Between these outstanding periods lie intervals of internal chaos and foreign invasion. For after all the pyramid of Egyptian society was less solidly built than the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and at times the superstructure became too heavy for the foundations. Pharaonic Egypt was a totalitarian state, in which it is perhaps possible to trace an evolution from arbitrary despotism to a bureaucratic state capitalism. In theory the whole country was 'Pharaoh's Fields', and the lives and property of his subjects were at his disposal. In practice, however, his power must always have been limited by custom. There are indications under the earliest dynasties of a class of freeholders, and even towards the end of the Old Kingdom, when the status of the peasants appears to have been at its lowest, they may not have been appreciably worse off than Mediaeval villeins. The produce of the soil belonged to the King for the maintenance of the army and civil service; but it was of course to his interest to leave the cultivators enough to live on. They were liable to forced service in the ranks or on public works of fortification or irrigation, the transport of a colossal statue or the building of a pyramid; but the amount and nature of such service seems to have been to some extent regulated. Probably the heaviest burdens fell on prisoners of war, who were no doubt treated as state slaves. Slavery on a large scale appears first in the New Kingdom, when Asiatic captives became plentiful. *planned*

Mining and quarrying were largely conducted by the state. Many skilled craftsmen were state employees, and the state contrived to exact a toll from all the profits of industry. This could only have been in goods or labour, for there was as yet no coined money. Business was carried on by barter, though for large transactions metal bars of standard weight were in use. The various trades and professions were mainly hereditary, as in Mediaeval Europe. Some peasants' sons must have drifted into other jobs, but class distinctions tended to develop into a caste system (though it was never made rigid by religious sanctions, as in India). *a trade by exchange*

Of course this organization was workable only with the aid of a many-graded hierarchy of royal officials, that mighty army of overseers and census-takers and tax-gatherers and scribes of every kind who figure so prominently in the monuments. The highest grade formed the nobility. Under the early dynasties the nobles lived at the court (as the French nobility lived at Versailles in the greatest days of the monarchy). Later they took to living on their estates, where they became so powerful that the central government lost all control over them. Their lands and offices became hereditary, and in practice (like the feudal barons of the Middle Ages) they tended to become virtually independent princes. This was apparently the chief cause that led to the break-up of the Old Kingdom. The strong kings of the Middle Kingdom, with popular support, broke their power, and under the New Kingdom an hereditary aristocracy had almost ceased to exist. The main check on the royal power at this time was the hereditary priesthood, a rival from which European monarchs of the Middle Ages were saved by the celibacy of the clergy. In theory Pharaoh was not only a god; he was the sole worshipper of all the gods, and the other priests acted only as his deputies.

A strong ruler made short work of the priests (despite their claims to supernatural power); but there was always a tendency for the lion's share of the land and the revenues to pass into the hands of the 'church', whose wealth and prestige at times overshadowed the power of the 'state'. To all appearance, while the Old Kingdom was destroyed by the rise of the nobles and the Middle Kingdom by nomad invaders from Asia (the *Hyksos*), the New Kingdom was disrupted mainly by the power of the priests of Amon, who appointed kings at the direction of an oracle and eventually made themselves kings (Dynasty XX). But, if we knew more, we should probably see as a contributory cause to these periodic collapses the failure of the productive classes (the base of the pyramid) to bear the huge burdens laid upon them. We hear indeed of outbreaks of mob violence and of strikes and riots among the workpeople reduced to starvation by the inefficiency or dishonesty of the royal officials. We know that in bad years, when the Nile was low and the cultivable area consequently small, there was widespread famine. Big grain reserves were stored in the royal granaries, but if the peasant failed to produce a surplus adequate to feed the army of officials and state employees, the whole pyramid was manifestly in danger of collapsing like a card-castle.

### *Reckoning and Writing*

Besides this material basis, the centralized organization of a country as large as Egypt demanded that broad intellectual basis whose essential components were discussed at the end of the preceding chapter. Egyptian thinkers, though they peopled heaven and earth with gods, were less befuddled by magic than the Mesopotamians; without losing themselves in the infinite like the Hindus or seeking to abstract general principles like the Greeks, they built up a useful body of working rules, notably in the field of mathematics. A document of the Middle Kingdom shows us how the tax-collector measured the area of a field or the capacity of a granary. Other problems deal with the number of men and bricks required in building a pyramid of given dimensions, the distribution of rations, etc. These operations, of course, depended on a recognized standard of weights and measures. The practice of mummification, which goes back to the Second Dynasty, required a good working knowledge of anatomy. Physicians were a respected class of the community, and some of their remedies were quite scientific, though most included an element of magic. Imhotep, physician and architect to King Zoser (Dynasty III), was afterwards worshipped as God of Medicine. As Egyptian agriculture depends entirely on the annual flood (which begins in June and reaches its height in October), it could not be regularly carried on without a calendar based on an accurate determination of the length of the solar year. This is not easy to discover except by means of exact astronomical observations extending over many years; yet there is evidence that the figure of 365½ days was known at least as early as the Old Kingdom (perhaps to Imhotep).

More important still was the invention of writing. In the cave drawings of the Reindeer Age we may see the beginnings of a rude system of picture-writing, like that of the North American Indians. By little sketches of men and animals, eked out with such conventional signs as the sun for a day and the moon for a month, an Indian can convey simple messages—not free from grave risks of misunderstanding. Such conventionalized signs appear among the drawings found on cliff-faces in what is now the Sahara Desert, and they recur on Egyptian pottery of the Predynastic Age. Some of these appear to represent totems, like those of the later nomes. Some perhaps are the makers' signatures, analogous to the drawings of a Sitting Bull or a White Owl with which Red Indian chiefs signed away their tribal lands to the Pale-Faces. Some may have been originally jokes—word-plays or puns like the canting coats-of-arms of many English families, in which a 'beacon' and a 'tun' may stand for 'Bekynton', and 'Parkinson' is

ingeniously rendered as 'Park-in-Sun'. By an extension of this use of puns, the Egyptians eventually found means to express any word in their language. Relatively few English words could be accurately reproduced in this way (as for instance the word 'intent' by drawings of an *inn* and a *tent*). But the Egyptian did not demand such exact equivalence of sound as this: by a handy convention, he insisted only on similarity of consonants. A drawing of a 'beacon' would serve equally well for 'bacon'; a 'boat' would do for 'bit' or 'but' or even 'beauty'. Where there was any doubt, the meaning could be fixed by the use of a 'determinative', a little drawing to show what class of object the writer is talking about. Thus suppose in English the consonant group *m-n* came to be represented by a crescent, the symbol of 'moon'. If we wanted to use it for 'man' we should draw a human figure after it; if we meant 'men' we should add the three dots that are a sign of the plural.

By this circuitous route the Egyptians had evolved before 3000 B.C. a beautiful and adequate, though very cumbrous, method of expressing their thoughts in permanent form. The characters used for inscriptions, called by the Greeks *hieroglyphic* ('sacred carving'), remained recognizably pictures. In writing with a reed brush on a special writing material, which they made by flattening out the stems of the *papyrus* reed and gumming them together in two layers, arranged crosswise, the Egyptians developed the simplified script known as *hieratic* ('priestly'); but, though the forms were simpler to draw, they still included all those used in hieroglyphics—consonants, syllables, determinatives and *ideograms* ('idea pictures'). The hieratic script, however, was adopted for commercial use by a Semitic people—probably in the first instance the workers at the Sinai quarries during the Middle Kingdom and later the Phoenicians<sup>1</sup>—who dropped out all but the few signs needed to represent the consonants. These they called by names of objects which they were supposed to resemble: '*aleph* (ox),<sup>2</sup> *beth* (house), *gimel* (camel), etc. When carving it is easier to work (as masons still do) from right to left; and this remained the normal practice for hieratic writing and so for Phoenician and the Hebrew and Arabic derived from it. The Phoenician 'alphabet' (*alpha beta* = '*aleph beth*') was adopted by the Greeks, who not only initiated the more convenient method of writing from left to right but also adapted certain unwanted signs to stand for the vowel sounds. This satisfied the keen Greek ear for verbal music by making it possible (for the first time) to represent the sound of a word accurately in writing. The form of the Greek alphabet adopted and adapted by the Romans is substantially the one used by most European nations today. It is significant that the original inventors, as attached as the champions of English spelling to the traditional forms, never saw those opportunities for improvement which were apparent to the borrowers.

Though nobody knows exactly how Ancient Egyptian writing was pronounced, scholars are able to tell us with a fair measure of confidence what it meant. We can thus get our earliest glimpse of human life and thought from the inside. What does it tell us? What did the ordinary man make of this vast pyramid that towered above him and weighed upon him, culminating in Pharaoh, the king and god? Let us pay a visit to the Middle Kingdom, under the 'just laws' of Dynasty XII, on a spring morning in the 20th Century B.C.

### *The Peasant and His Prospects*

Then, as now, the Nile waters transformed a strip of the *Red Earth* of the desert into the *Black Earth* to which the country owes its ancient name (*Khem*,

<sup>1</sup> The Phoenicians themselves attributed the invention of writing to *Taaut* (i.e. the Egyptian *Thoth*, the God of the Gods).

<sup>2</sup> The consonant represented by '*aleph*' (a sort of glottal stop) does not occur in the European language.

whence the name of the *chemic* science), and gave to the rhythm of the seasons a distinctive local quality. In the picturesque language of Claudian of Alexandria:

For Egypt alone of all lands is exempt from the season's caprices  
And ripens her fruits for the reaping unaided of wind or of rain  
And bears on her bosom the waters that feed her, when Nilus increases  
And streaming in spate from deep caverns, his fountains, comes flooding amain.

From his birth-place unwitnessed, meandering wide, throughout Libya he wanders,  
Through myriad dusky dominions where Aethiop monarchs hold sway,  
Through heat-accurst realms where the sun his dire radiance unceasingly squanders,  
Bringing ease to the drought-stricken peoples he glides on his life-giving way,

Past Meroë, dark-lued Syené and barbarous Blemmyan nations,  
Slaking the unsubdued Garamant and the breaker of brutes,  
The Girrhaean, in cavernous cliffs who makes his uncouth habitations,  
Culling ivory tusks for his trophies and ebony boughs for his fruits.

By his banks he is meekly confined when wild Winter all streams else has swollen;  
When shrunken and sluggish they trickle, then Nile in his turn runs high;  
For all waters from all of the streams of the world that Summer has stolen,  
These Nature recalls to replenish Nile only, lest Nile run dry.

In the Dog-days, when Sirius arms with more death-dealing ardour the Titan  
And parches the earth of her vapours and slackens the flow in her veins,  
Then Nile knows his Winter, though sunbeams effulgent the high heaven brighten,  
And pours his waves, welcome to tillers of earth, like a sea o'er the plains.

More broad than th' Aegean he flows, than the boist'rous Ionian more sweeping.  
Far and wide 'neath the deluge the corn-lands are drowned, so that oftentimes a boat  
Plies oars over fields or some herdsman, at noontide caught carelessly sleeping,  
From his shady sicca awakened finds cattle and cow-shed afloat.

*Idyll IV.*

At the time of our visit the Black Earth is a green sea of wheat and barley, six to twelve miles broad between the red cliff-walls of Upper Egypt but opening out into the wide levels of the Delta, whose dense papyrus swamps house a multitude of wildfowl. The monotonous landscape is broken here and there by a cluster of mud hovels with overtopping date palms, and intersected throughout by sluggish, mosquito-haunted irrigation ditches and narrow pathways. Along one such path comes a train of donkeys laden with salt and skins and other 'goodly products of the Salt Field' (an oasis west of the Delta); their driver's name is Khunanup, and he is coming down into Egypt to buy food for his wife Marye and his children.<sup>1</sup> Beside the path, which is 'no broader than a loin-cloth', stands the house of one Dehutinekht, a bailiff on the estate of the king's Chief Steward. As the procession draws near, the covetous Dehutinekht hits on a scheme for getting possession of the donkeys and their load. He stretches a sheet over the path, 'so that its one hem rests on the water and the other on the barley', and refuses to allow the Peasant to pass. While they dispute, one of the donkeys happens to fill its mouth with a wisp of barley, and the bailiff seizes this pretext for confiscating the whole troop and flogging their owner. Khunanup goes on his way, empty-handed but confident in the righteousness of his cause, till he comes to the capital and meets the Chief Steward himself 'coming forth from the door of his house to go down into his barge belonging to the judgement-hall'. The Chief Steward, remembering perhaps the Egyptian proverb that a man with a grievance wants a hearing even more than redress, listens to the Peasant's plea and recognizes its justice, but is so much amused by his indignant eloquence that (after consultation with his royal master) he proceeds to draw him out by feigning indifference. Nine times

<sup>1</sup> His story is told in a document of our period, though it is assigned to a rather earlier age.

does the Peasant renew his petition in words whose flowery grandiloquence was a medium, suited to the Egyptian taste, for expressing the basic principles of just government (*ma'at*). A small sample must suffice:

'Thou tiller of heaven, thou beam of the earth, thou plumb-line that carrieth the weight. Tiller, tumble not; beam, tilt not; plumb-line, swing not awry! . . . Thou art the Nile, which maketh green the meadows and maketh habitable the waste places. . . . Become not a torrent against the petitioner!' (Erman and Blackman. *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, pp. 121, 123.)

When at length he despairs and threatens to refer his petition to *Anubis*, judge of the dead, the High Steward reveals his little conspiracy and passes judgement with poetic justice—the possessions of Dehutinekht are to be given to his victim.

Here the narrative ends. We are left to fill in the background of Khunanup's life and speculate, if we choose, on the use he made of his new fortune. The life of a peasant had its bright side. In the tomb paintings, we catch a glimpse of him singing some cheery song about the joys of harvest or the nice cool weather or cracking a simple jest at the expense of a comrade. He enjoyed a good deal of freedom: the countryfolk were divided for purposes of labour and taxation into 'hands' (bodies of five men), under the control of foremen, but probably these were mainly family groups; they were not gangs of serfs at this date. Not all peasants, however, were as eloquent or as fortunate as Khunanup, and there were fearful possibilities to be faced.

'The caterpillars have destroyed half the corn, and the hippopotamus has eaten the rest. The rats are numerous in the country, and the locust comes down, and the cattle devour, and the little birds pillage. . . . Anything that may be left on the threshing-floor is finished by robbers. . . . The team kills itself, dragging the plough. . . . Then the scribe arrives and taxes [or 'registers'] the harvest. The porters are there with their cudgels, and the negroes with their palm-sticks. "Give up the corn!" they say. There is none. Then they beat the farmer, and load him with bonds and throw him in the ditch. . . . His wife is loaded with bonds in front of him, his children are put in chains, his neighbours abandon him and fly, carrying off their corn.' (Quoted in A. Moret: *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization*, p. 267. Cf. Erman and Blackman, p. 193.)

No doubt Khunanup will try to ensure that his children escape from a life so full of hardship and insecurity. One of them, perhaps, has heard the famous tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, and hopes that he too may venture out on to the 'Great Green' and light on a desert island peopled only by an amiable serpent and return with a rich cargo of 'myrrh and eye-cosmetic, giraffes' tails, elephant tusks, greyhounds, monkeys and all goodly treasures'. Another may have dreamed of self-fulfilment after the manner of Mertisen, on whose tomb it is written:

'I was an artist skilled in my art. I knew my art, how to represent the forms of going forth and returning, so that each limb may be in its proper place. I knew how the figure of a man should walk and the carriage of a woman; the poising of the arm to bring the hippopotamus low, the going of the runner.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* [1932], p. 146. So also an architect of Sesostris I proclaims: 'I myself rejoiced, my heart was glad at that which I had executed.' (Quoted by J. H. Breasted: *The Dawn of Conscience*, p. 224.)

But there is no sharp line between the painter and the writer of hieroglyphs, and we cannot doubt that Khunanup with his own remarkable gift of the gab would urge upon his offspring the advantages of a literary career. He would find the case eloquently stated in the words addressed by an earlier scribe to his pupil:

'Would that I might make thee love books more than thy mother, would that I might bring their beauty before thy face! It is greater than any calling. . . . Every artisan that wieldeth the chisel, he is wearier than he that delveth; his field is the wood and his hoe is the metal. In the night, when he is set free, he worketh beyond what his arms can do; in the night he burneth a light. . . . The gardener bringeth loads, and his arm and neck ache beneath them. At noon he watereth the leek and at even the vines. . . . The weaver in the workshop, he fareth more ill than any women. His thighs are upon his belly, and he breatheth no air. He giveth bread to the doorkeeper that he may suffer him to come into the daylight. The arrow-maker, he fareth ill exceedingly when he goeth up into the desert [in quest of flints]. . . . The fowler, when he looketh at the migrant birds in the sky, crieth "Would that I had a net here!" But God giveth him no success. . . . Behold there is no calling that is without a director save that of the scribe, and he *is* the director. . . . At the head of the officials is he set, and his father and his mother thank God for it.'<sup>1</sup>

The scribe might be only a humble clerk or foreman in the civil service, but an able and ambitious man who had once mastered the intricacies of the Egyptian scripts with their 500 characters and the elaborate forms of official language possessed the key to all offices of trust and authority in the country. In his literary ambitions he was hampered by a difficulty not unknown to later writers. The priest Ankhu of Heliopolis in the reign of Sesostri II complains:

'Would that I had words that are unknown, utterances and sayings in new language . . . without that which hath been said repeatedly—not an utterance that hath grown stale, what the ancestors have already said.' (Erman and Blackman, p. 109.)

Socially the official of humble origin would have to face the common lot of the parvenu, but even in the less elastic society of the Old Kingdom the accepted code of manners had given him a recognized status. The vizir Ptahhotep thus admonishes his son:

'If thou art an humble person and art in the train of a man of repute, one that standeth well with the god [i.e. the king], know thou nothing of his former insignificance. Reverence him in accordance with what hath happened unto him, for wealth cometh not of itself. . . . It is God that createth repute.' (*Ibid.*, p. 58.)

Ptahhotep's advice reveals an odd mixture of worldly wisdom and real delicacy of feeling, reminiscent now of Polonius, now of the Old Testament *Book of Proverbs*:<sup>2</sup> he enjoins flattery of the great, but also respect for the humblest ('For a good discourse is more hidden than the precious green stone, and yet is it found with

<sup>1</sup> Erman and Blackman, pp. 68–72. Cf. in the still earlier *Admonitions to Meri-ke-re*: 'Be a craftsman in speech that thou mayst be strong; for the strength of a man is the tongue and speech is mightier than any fighting.' Cf. also *Ecclesiasticus*, xxxviii, 29–39 and (for a later parallel) the poem *Vide fabrum*, No. 99 in *The Oxford Book of Mediaeval Latin Verse*.

<sup>2</sup> It is generally agreed that *Proverbs* xxii–xxiv incorporates sections of a later Egyptian work, *The Teaching of Amenemope* (13th Century B.C.), which is itself indebted to Ptahhotep.

slave-girls over the mill-stones'); he recommends his son to take a wife and 'gladden her heart so long as she liveth' but to 'hold her back from getting the mastery', and he warns him carefully against feminine wiles.

The polite society, to which we are introduced by writings such as this, had a genuine culture and refinement, besides an intense artistic sensibility and the first glimmerings of a scientific outlook on life. To those few who were privileged to enter it, it offered much. But was it worth the price paid by the over-taxed multitudes on whom the social pyramid rested? Is it not possible that the masses might have been better off without this costly superstructure of civilization? A priestly writer has left a fantastic picture of the topsy-turvydom that followed the overturning of the social structure ('like a potter's wheel') at the end of the Old Kingdom:

'Poor men now possess fine things. He who once made for himself no sandals now possesseth riches. . . . The high-born are full of lamentations and the poor are full of joy. Every town saith: "Let us drive out the powerful from our midst." . . . All female slaves have grown free with their tongues. When their mistresses speak, it is irksome to the servants. . . . Magic spells are divulged and are become of none effect, for the people have them in mind. The public offices are opened and their lists taken away. Serfs become lords of serfs.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 95-99.)

All this cannot have seemed so terrible to some as it did to the writer. No doubt his picture is overdrawn, but we can visualize the wild carnival of riot and destruction—and the inevitable sequel:

'The Nile is in flood, yet none plougheth for him. Every man saith: "We know not what hath happened throughout the land". . . . Men feed on herbs and drink water. . . . The roads are [beset] and the streets are watched. Men sit in the bushes until the benighted traveller cometh in order to take from him his load. . . . The Red Land [i.e. the desert nomads] is spread abroad throughout the country. The homes are destroyed. The stranger people from without are come into Egypt.' (*Ibid.*)

Worst of all, even the dead are not safe:

'They that were in the Pure Place, they are cast forth upon the high ground. The secret of the embalmers, it lieth open.' (*Ibid.*, p. 100.)

We begin to understand that the strong government of the Middle Kingdom was hailed with real enthusiasm:

'A king shall come forth from the south called Ameni [Amenemhet I, founder of Dynasty XII] . . . The foes succumb to his onset, and the rebels to his might. . . . The Asiatics shall not again be suffered to come down into Egypt. They beg again for water, after their accustomed wise, that they may give their cattle to drink. And Right (*Ma'at*) shall come again into its place, and Iniquity is cast forth.' (*Ibid.*, p. 115.)

But Amenemhet did not meet with unmixed gratitude. A document that was a favourite writing exercise for schoolboys in the New Kingdom pictures him in his old age addressing his son (afterwards Sesostri I) in tones of bitter disillusionment:

'I stood upon the boundaries of the land and beheld its circuit. I carried forward the boundaries of my power by my prowess. I was one that produced barley and loved the corn-god. None hungered in my years and none

thirsted in them. Men dwelt in peace through that which I wrought . . . and all that I commanded was as it should be. . . . I gave to the poor and nourished the orphan. I caused him that was nothing to reach the goal, even as him that was of account. . . . Mine images are among the living and my shares in the offerings among men. Yet did they contrive a conspiracy against me without it being heard and a great contest without it being seen. . . . It was he who ate my food that turned against me; it was he to whom I gave my hand that aroused fear therewith.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 72-74.)

He points the obvious moral:

'Be on thy guard against subordinates. Approach them not and be not alone. Trust not a brother, know not a friend and make not for thyself intimates—that profiteth nothing. If thou sleepest, do thou thyself guard thine heart; for in the day of adversity a man hath no adherents.' (*Ibid.*, p. 72.)

Perhaps after all Khunanup, the poor peasant of the Salt Field, was the happier man of the two.

### 'The Land of Eternity'

The intrigues surrounding Amenemhet's throne involved a noble named Sinuhe who, on the king's death, fled into exile in Canaan, first to the port of Byblos and then up country to the encampment of a Bedouin sheikh, whose daughter he took to wife. Though his superior accomplishments made him a man of note among these barbarians, he continued to be homesick. At length, having convinced king Sesostri of his innocence (concerning which he protests too much), he was welcomed back to court. There is real literary finish in the episode of his single combat with a Canaanite champion and the lively scene in which the court ladies affect to disbelieve that this hairy savage can be the elegant courtier Sinuhe. But perhaps the most interesting point in his story is that it was not for the flesh-pots of Egypt that the exile pined (he had bread and wine specially prepared for him, besides the wild game of the desert); not so much even for the luxury of clean linen, a shave and a bath; but primarily for a decent funeral. It is with this offer that the king tempts him to come home:

'Even today thou hast begun to be old, thou hast lost thy manhood, and hast bethought thee of the day of burial, the passing to honour. . . . A funeral procession is made for thee on the day of burial; the mummy shell is of gold, with head of lapis lazuli. . . . Oxen drag thee on a sledge, and singers go before thee. . . . The Requirements of the Offering Table are recited for thee, and victims are slain at thine offering-stones. . . . Thy pillars are wrought of white stone in the midst of the royal children. Thus shalt thou not die abroad, nor shall the Asiatics bury thee. Thou shalt not be wrapped in a sheep-skin.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.)

Here we are brought face to face with the enigmatic core of Egyptian civilization—'its real life, the life that we find it so difficult to understand, . . . the life of death'.<sup>1</sup> Wherein lay that unshakable faith that induced king and commoner alike to sacrifice so many of the good things of this life for the sake of a life beyond the tomb? We have seen the belief in a future life foreshadowed by the burial customs of Old Stone Age hunters and the sacred *Mysteries* wherein the first cultivators linked the life of man with the annual rebirth of the crops. In Egypt we first find it asserted in written documents—asserted repeatedly and vehemently

<sup>1</sup> M. Maeterlinck: *Ancient Egypt* [English edition 1925], p. 37.



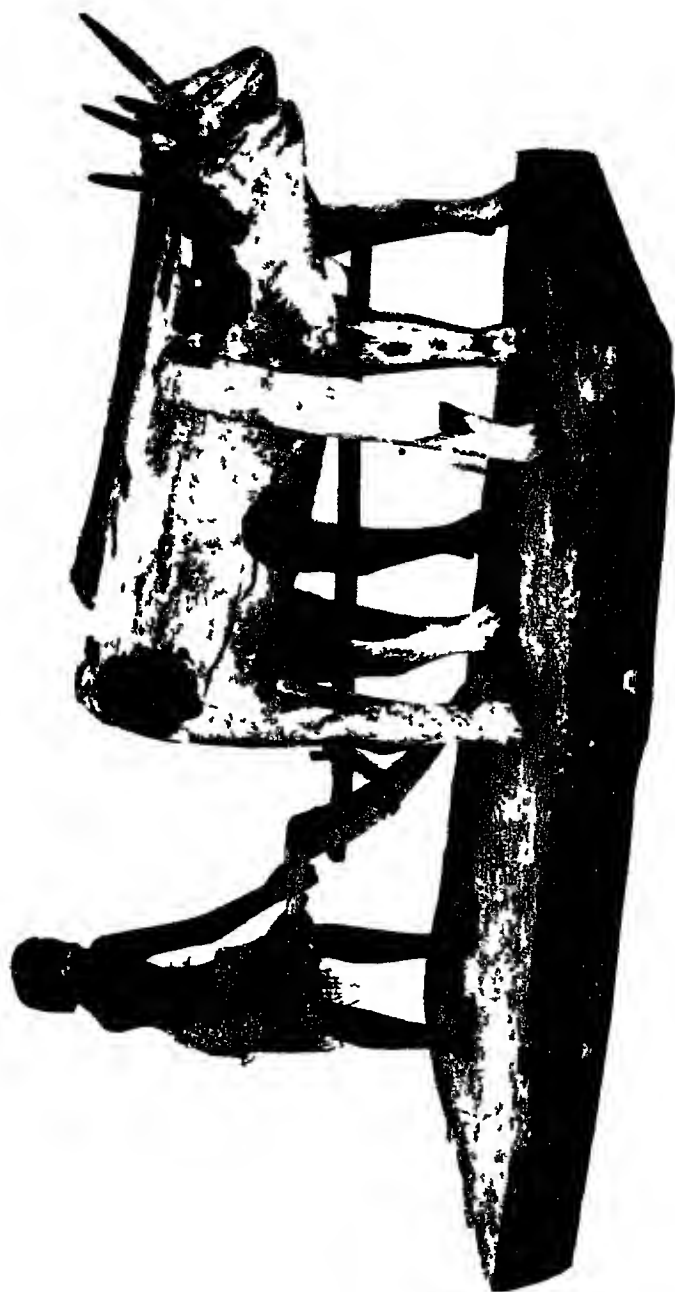
but with that utter disregard for consistency which is a feature of Egyptian religion as a whole. In the venerable usages and formulae of the priesthoods we shall look in vain for a coherent body of doctrine. The priests were custodians of such scientific and historical knowledge as existed. As Pharaoh's deputies in the discharge of the duties he inherited from the old rain-maker magicians, they performed an important function in the life of the state—important not in virtue of any actual effect on the weather or the crops but as a stabilizing and unifying force acting through the minds of men. By faithfully preserving the utterances of the ancients, no matter how contradictory, they did a better service to the historian than if they had tied them into a rational theology.

Viewed in historical perspective, Egyptian religion no longer appears as a cloak to conceal profound truths. And yet, if we could enter fully into the minds of these ancient worshippers and myth-makers, we should understand many things that are now hidden from us: we should begin to see how the struggling human intelligence formed its conceptions of Nature and society, right and wrong, life and death, now facing facts squarely, now running away from them, anon slipping into mental paralysis from the lazy acceptance of images that had ceased to stimulate or guide the imagination that begot them.

Briefly, we are faced with the product of a long prehistoric process of fusion (not to say confusion) in which we can distinguish at least three main elements.

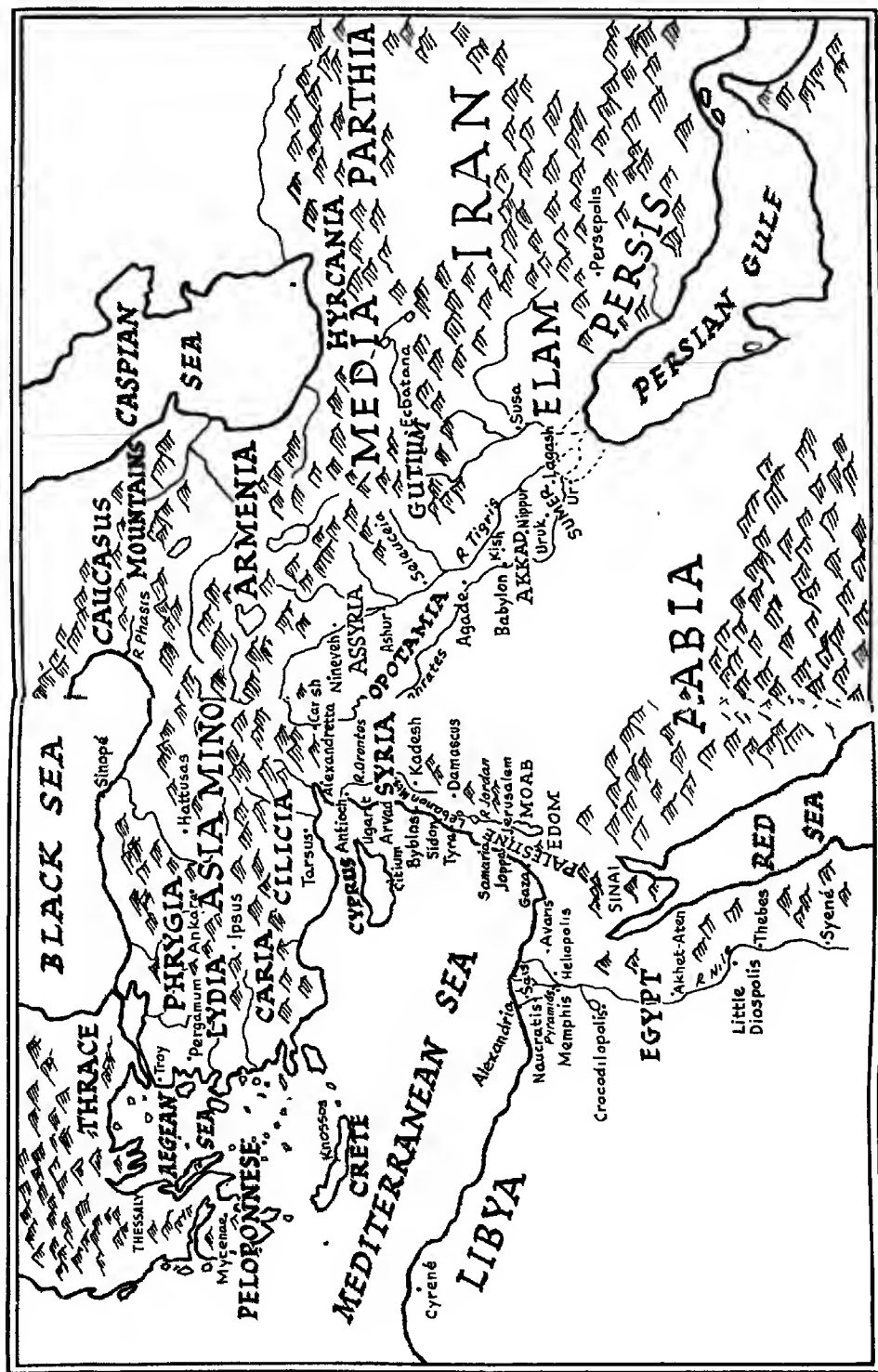
The oldest element is the local worship of gods, mostly represented in animal form, who probably originated as the totems of hunting tribes and were preserved as the divine patrons first of separate states and later of provinces. Even when Egypt had become part of the Roman Empire, many of these cults, with their peculiar rites and taboos, were kept alive by the local priesthoods; and woe betide the man who killed a cat in the city of the Cat Goddess *Ubastet*, or a crocodile in the nome of Crocodilopolis! Basically, these deities were all very similar, in the sense that they embodied conceptions of a supernatural power entertained by very similar communities; but superficially the most important thing about them was their dissimilarity, since their primary purpose had been to express every tribe's sense of internal unity and difference from its neighbours. This made it possible, after their worshippers were united politically, to devise a composite mythology in which the different gods performed appropriate functions. While the self-sufficient food-gatherer could picture a Creator working unaided, it was easier for villagers to imagine a divine community of specialists, each minding his own job. Thus *Ptah* of Memphis, capital of the first six Dynasties and an early centre of industry, was specifically the Divine Craftsman and patron of craftsmen and his high priest was the 'Chief Artificer'. Similarly the Ibis or Baboon God *Thoth* was also the Scribe of the Gods. But the Egyptian gods never became so fully human as those of Greece, nor so departmental as those of Rome.

The second element in Egyptian religion, introduced perhaps by nomadic conquerors, was a form of sun-worship, which was fostered as a symbol of the unified state. Far back in Predynastic times the Falcon God *Horus* was represented by the hieroglyph of the winged sun-disk. Possibly as a counter stroke of policy, the priests of the city of On, which at that time aspired to supremacy over Lower Egypt, identified their Mongoose God *Atum* with the sun under the name of *Re*, so that On earned the title 'City of the Sun' (Greek *Heliopolis*) and its chief priest, the 'Great Seer', became the head of the national church. Under the Old Kingdom the state religion was the worship of *Re*, generally in the form of *Re-Atum*, though various other gods were also identified with him. On the accession of the Theban king Amenemhet ('Amon-at-the-Head'), the obscure local ram god *Amon* of Thebes was exalted to headship of the pantheon under the name of *Amon-Re*; but he continued to be quite differently worshipped from the *Re* of Heliopolis, and the two priesthoods were bitterly jealous of each other,



[British Museum Photograph]

EGYPTIAN PEASANT PLOUGHING





*(Photograph by Dr. F. G. Clunow)*

KUTIAS ON THE TIGRIS



*(Photograph by M. N. Lubin)*

THE ZIGGURAT OF UR

✓ In Re the Egyptians personified their conception of the universe as a well ordered monarchy. He was their 'shepherd' (a title also given to Pharaoh), and they were his 'flocks'. He was the Creator of all things by the power of the Word ('what came out of his mouth') in the time when heaven and earth were not. He was the establisher of a moral order, which was apparently conceived as having been supreme on earth in the days 'before death came forth'. He remained the president of a celestial court of justice; and 'Righteousness' or 'Truth' (*Ma'at*) was his daughter.

✓ While the kings and nobles glorified their resplendent patron Re, the common folk were spinning the third main strand in Egyptian religion, one that expressed the ideas of a peasant community. Its central figure, *Osiris*, was an embodiment of the life-giving crops and fruits—of the waters that fed them and of the earth from which they sprang—the earth to which men's bodies were committed like seed in the hope that (like the Dinka rain-makers) they might bring forth new life. By his association with the Tree of Life and his emblem of the sacred pillar, Osiris is linked with the Canaanite ritual of the 'green tree' or pole (*ashērah*), so hotly denounced by the Hebrew prophets, and so with the maypole dancing of Europe. A famous myth describes how he was killed by his enemies and his body was dismembered and scattered like seed or (according to another version) floated to Byblos in Canaan; but his consort *Isis* recovered it, and bore a son who restored his father to life. There must have been some link between this and the Asiatic legend of *Tammuz* (*Adonis*) and the Mother Goddess *Astarté*, which probably originated in a matrilineal society.

At first there was rivalry between the Sun God and the Lord of the Underworld. One of the Old Kingdom Pharaohs is assured, by a text written on an inner wall of his pyramid: 'Re-Atum doth not give thee to Osiris.' But Osiris' son was early identified with the Falcon-Sun God Horus, and he himself eventually gained the entrée to the solar heaven and usurped the functions and titles of Re as ruler of an ideal kingdom of which Egypt was but an imperfect copy.

In this mixed grill earnest seekers could find food enough for feeling or thought. The author of the *Admonitions to Meri-ke-re* was able to cut through the tangle to 'the God who hath hidden himself', to whom 'the virtue of the upright man is more acceptable than the ox of him that worketh iniquity.' But probably most priests accepted the mysteries of their faith without probing beneath the surface, believing what the fathers had taught even while they were gulling the populace with pious frauds—nodding idols pulled by strings or oracles worked by means of secret passages. And the attitude of the average layman (our friend Khunanup for instance) was no doubt that of his modern counterpart towards the subtler points of theology. He must have thought of a temple much as we think of an electric power-house. We are vaguely aware that, if those whirring dynamos ceased to function, the supply of electric power and light would break down. But few of us have any clear notion *how* they work. We assume that the attendants know their job. If we heard that the whole theory of what electricity really is had been revolutionized, we should not be greatly perturbed. Neither would the man who looks after the dynamos. Most of the priestly worship was performed within the temple precincts, to which the public were seldom admitted. Behind that huge closed gate flanked by towering pylons the white-robed priests went through their mysterious rites of sacrifice and purification and chanted their unintelligible hymns; so Re completed his daily voyage across the heavens, the Nile flooded, seeds germinated and flocks multiplied and the scheme of things was kept going—but it was dreadful to contemplate that disasters might ensue if the dynamos ceased to whirr!

Against this background of incompatible and uncomprehended traditions we can better understand the Egyptian attitude to death. Generation after

generation continued to provide for the dead as though they were still alive, a practice inherited from subhuman times but also closely linked to the ritual of Osiris, whose dead body was restored to life. Gradually, however, the act became more symbolic. Real food and utensils were replaced by models. Statuettes of ploughmen, cooks and the like were also provided, possibly as substitutes for actual victims. The banquets prepared for the deceased by his descendants, or by specially endowed mortuary priests, came to be conceived as commemorative rather than physically nutritive. The process of embalming, which must surely have been intended to preserve the body, was interpreted as a rite of purification. The pyramid, which had housed it so securely, became a finger-post pointing the soul to the sky. A clearer distinction was drawn between body and soul—or rather souls, for the Egyptians (like many uncivilized peoples today) believed that each individual had two or three.

The Pyramid Texts describe the Pharaoh, in the language of the solar religion, as 'leaping skyward like a grasshopper'. When he reached heaven, however, he signalized his triumphant entry by 'eating the magic of the gods and swallowing their lordliness' and even devouring the gods themselves—a notion that must surely have survived from the savage world of totemism. As 'Son of the Sun' the king was promoted at death to partnership (or identity?) with Re himself. He also shared his berth in the Solar Barge with his kin and favourites buried in the precincts of the royal pyramid. Under the Old Kingdom commoners appear to have been debarred from this celestial realm, though the household furniture found in their graves shows that they looked forward to some sort of afterlife, presumably in the underworld of Osiris. Sometimes their bodies, like that of Osiris, were dismembered. The entry of Osiris into the heaven of Re pointed the way for his worshippers. The approach towards social equality under the Middle Kingdom was symbolized (and doubtless aided) by a religious revolution. As king Pepi of the Old Kingdom had been transformed at death into the god 'Osiris Pepi', so under the Middle Kingdom even the meanest peasant would be transformed into 'Osiris Khunanup', or whatever his lowly name might be, while his wife might similarly become *Hat-hor* (a Cow Goddess sometimes identified with Isis). And on his coffin might be written, as an utterance of the Sun God:

'I have made every man like his brother, and I have forbidden that they do evil. It was their hearts that undid that which I have said.' (Quoted in J. H. Breasted: *The Dawn of Conscience*, p. 221.)

Passages from such Coffin Texts and others from the Pyramid Texts were combined with later matter under the New Kingdom to form the *Book of the Dead*. A copy of this celestial passport was regularly buried with the mummy, to help the deceased to pass with credit through a very searching oral examination conducted by the Jackal God *Anubis* with forty-two assistants before the judgement seat of Osiris (who had ousted Re even from this office). The torments awaiting the unsuccessful candidate, which are portrayed in highly coloured drawings, had been zealously elaborated by the priests in the interests of public morality—though we may suspect that they had also learnt how to make a profit out of 'Purgatory Pick-purse'. Far from confessing his guilt and seeking absolution, the examinee is represented as pleading not guilty with wearisome reiteration to all the charges brought against him. His plea may be summarized thus:

'I have not done evil. I have committed no violence, I have not stolen, I have not caused any man to be killed treacherously, I have not diminished the offerings (of the Gods), I have not lied, I have made no one weep, I have not been impure, I have not killed the sacred beasts, I have not damaged

cultivated land, I have not spoken calumniously, I have not shown anger, I have not committed adultery, I have not refused to hear the words of truth, I have not done witchcraft against the King or my father, I have not polluted water, I have not caused a slave to be ill-treated by his master, I have not sworn (falsely). I have not tampered with the plumb-line of the balance, I have not taken the milk from the mouth of sucklings, I have not netted the birds of the Gods, I have not turned back the water in its season, I have not cut a water-channel in its course, I have not quenched fire in its hour, I have not despised God in my heart. I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!' (A. Moret: *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization*, p. 398.)

Though some of these would be classed by us as purely ritual offences, the list as a whole shows that the 'Establisher of Justice' expects a high moral standard—in fact too high for human frailty. But human ingenuity is equal to the occasion: one of the amulets buried with the dead is designed to prevent his heart from giving him away by an untimely confession of the truth.

In contrast to this paltry juggling, the vein of genuine religious feeling that appeared in such writings as the *Admonitions to Meri-ke-re* runs through all subsequent Egyptian thought. After inspiring the short-lived Aten movement, which will be considered later in its international setting, it emerged in a more personal form in many hymns of the New Kingdom. In one, for instance, the worshipper appeals to Re: 'Punish me not for my many sins.' In another occurs this passage:

'Thou, Amon, art the lord of him that is silent, one who cometh at the voice of the poor. If I call upon thee when I am in distress, thou comest that thou mayest deliver me. . . . Though the servant is disposed to commit sin, yet is the Lord disposed to be merciful. The lord of Thebes passeth not a whole day wroth. His wrath is finished in a moment, and nought is left. The wind hath turned about to us in mercy, and Amon hath turned with his wind.' (Erman and Blackman, p. 311. Cf. pp. 83, 307.)

When all is said, both the credulity and the otherworldliness of the Egyptians may easily be overrated. The majority, no doubt, while accepting the chaotic absurdity of the orthodox religion at its face value, did not let it distract them too much from the business and pleasure of daily life. There are indications that the more thoughtful realized that gods who merged into one another so kaleidoscopically belonged to a world of imagery whose details must not be taken too literally. Others were moved to frank scepticism of the 'Eat, drink and be merry' school. A song sung at banquets during the Middle Kingdom expresses this quite openly:

'I have heard the discourses of Imhotep and Hardedef [son of Cheops], with whose words men speak everywhere—what are their habitations now? Their walls are destroyed, their habitations are no more, as if they had never been. None cometh from thence that he may tell us how they fare, that he may tell us what they need, that he may set our heart at rest, until we also go to the place whither they are gone. . . . Follow thy desire so long as thou livest. Put myrrh on thine head and clothe thee in fine linen . . . and vex not thine heart—until that day of lamentation cometh unto thee. Yet He with the Quiet Heart [Osiris] heareth not the voice of lamentation, and cries deliver no man from the underworld.' (*Ibid.*, p. 133.)

There were other sceptics to whom the joys of life had ceased to appeal. In a curious dialogue with his own soul, a pessimist of the Middle Kingdom proclaims:

Death is before me today  
 As when a man longeth to see his house again,  
 After he hath spent many years in captivity (*Ibid*, p. 92)

And here, from a New Kingdom text, is a picture of the Land o' the Leal that may serve as a parting glimpse of the authentic soul of Egypt.

'I have heard these songs that are in the tombs of ancient time. What they say, when they extol the life on earth and belittle the region of the dead—to what purpose is it that they act thus towards the land of eternity, the just and the right, where no terrors are? Wrangling is its abhorrence, and there is none that girdeth himself against his fellow. This land that hath no foe, all our kindred rest in it since the earliest day of time, and they that shall be in millions of millions of years, they come thither every one. There is none that may tarry in the Land of Egypt, there is not one that doth not pass yonder. The duration of that which is done upon earth is as a dream. "Welcome safe and sound" is said to him that hath reached the West.' (*Ibid.*, p. 253.)

## VI

### THE SURVEY CONTINUED: MESOPOTAMIA

#### *From Nile to Euphrates*

THE ordinary Egyptian of the Middle Kingdom, as the story of Sinuhe clearly implies, assumed with patriotic pride that all who lived beyond the bounds of the Black Earth were mere sand-dwelling barbarians. But Sinuhe himself, and those royal emissaries whom he entertained in the course of their journeyings to and fro in the land of Canaan, must surely have been aware that, not 1,000 miles from Egypt, there existed a rival society no whit inferior in political organization and knowledge of the arts of life. Let us leave Egypt, in the 20th Century B.C., and set off in quest of this new civilization.

Like Sinuhe, we shall go first to Byblos; but we shall be well advised to avoid the desert tract between the eastern mouth of the Nile and the city of Gaza by doing this stage of our journey by sea, skirting along the coast of Canaan (later called Palestine after the Philistines or Judaea after the Jews, but there are no Philistines yet and no Jews). If we wait till the spring gales are over, we shall probably have no difficulty in finding a vessel bound in quest of that cedarwood of Lebanon which was a prime necessity for treeless Egypt, besides enamelled ware, dyed and embroidered cloths, perfumes and Asiatic slaves. If there was a good Nile last year, and there is 'corn in Egypt', our outward cargo may consist largely of wheat. Or, like Wen-Amon some eight centuries later, we may take vessels of gold and silver, garments of royal linen, fine papyrus(?),<sup>1</sup> oxhides, ropes, lentils and (rather surprisingly) fish. We must hope for better speed than Wen Amon, who was kept hanging about in Byblos till he saw the migrant birds go down a second time into Egypt. But we shall do well to wait at least till we can join a caravan of merchants trading wine and olive oil and the products of Canaanite (and perhaps Egyptian) industry to regions further east. We shall find a considerable Egyptian colony at Byblos: a temple to an Egyptian deity had been

<sup>1</sup> Papyrus may have travelled by this route to Greece, where it was called *byblos* (whence *biblion*, 'book').



built here more than 1,000 years before, under Dynasty II—so far as is yet known, it was the earliest stone building in the world. The natives, however, are gaunt black-bearded Semites, familiar figures in Egyptian art; in later days the Greeks called them *Phoenicians* (i.e. 'Redskins').

After due preparation (there has never been any hurry in the East) the caravan is ready to start. The long strings of heavily laden donkeys, with their shouting drivers and armed guard of slaves or hired servants and vigilant scouts reconnoitring ahead, file slowly up a narrow pass of the wooded Lebanon, 'where the sky is dark by day, with cedars that reach heaven', as an Egyptian noted. Lumbering is in full swing, and the cedars are falling under the blows of stone or bronze axes. At night, unless we have reached some town where there is a caravanserai to give accommodation to man and beast, we sleep round the camp-fire, hoping that our sentinels are not sleeping too. Then we descend again to Kadesh on the Orontes, where Egyptians and Hittites were one day to squander their manhood in vain. After following down the Orontes for some days we strike east across the Syrian desert, keeping a sharp look-out for raiding hordes of Amorites. But we are lucky. The stray bands of nomads we meet are too peaceable or too weak to attack us; they are willing enough, after some higgling, to furnish us with fresh meat, milk and cheese, but cast greedy eyes on the rich bales from which we dole out the stipulated price. One of the bands is led by a man called Abraham, who believes (though he does not tell us so) that his family god has given the whole land of Canaan to his children for an inheritance. 'He is a dreamer; let us leave him.'

At last the thin herbage of the desert gives place to a richer vegetation, and we strike the big bend of the Euphrates. This, when the Egyptians first encountered it, appeared to them a second Nile flowing (rather to their bewilderment) in the wrong direction. But it flows much more swiftly than the Nile, and in its upper reaches there is one-way traffic only. If we are in haste, we may embark, donkey and all, in what is called by the modern Iraqis a *kuffa*, built of skins stretched over a wooden framework. From very early times, these boats have been drifted down with the current to some town of lower Mesopotamia, where the woodwork is sold as well as the cargo (generally palm toddy in Herodotus' day) and the skin cover is loaded on to the donkey for the return journey. As we are swept down the swift-flowing stream, day after day, we notice that the banks are lined with fields of wheat and barley and sesame and orchards of date palms and other fruit trees. Villages of mud-brick hovels become more frequent and bigger, till we find ourselves passing undeniable towns and at last we drift in under the shadow of Babylon—Bab-Ilâni, the 'Gateway of the Gods'—'the city built by potters', as an oracle called it. For wood is as scarce here as in Egypt and stone is much scarcer; everything seems to be made of clay. At the time of our visit it is not yet the colossal mass of brickwork that staggered Herodotus fifteen centuries later; its greatness dates only from the *First Dynasty of Babylon*, which began to reign (according to one reckoning) about 2100 B.C.<sup>1</sup> But it is already wearing the airs of an imperial city, fit capital of Hammurabi, 'the mighty king', 'the wise, the prudent', 'the monarch who towers above the kings of the cities', 'the sun of Babylon whose light beams over Sumer and Akkad', 'the invader of the four quarters of the world, exalter of the fame of Babylon, rejoicer of the heart of his lord Marduk whom he daily serves in his temple of E Sagila'—for Marduk, god of Babylon, has also newly risen from obscurity to be the ruler of 'an eternal kingdom whose foundations, like heaven and earth, shall endure'.

<sup>1</sup> On this reckoning Hammurabi died about 1900 B.C. Recent evidence tends to support a chronology which would put him as late as the 18th Century.

*Sumer and Akkad: Origins*

If we wish to get our bearings in this imposing empire, to learn something of its geography and history, we cannot do better than direct our steps to E Sagila and consult a learned member of its priesthood. We shall find the temple standing aloft on a vast platform of mud brick—the *ziggurat* ('Hill of Heaven'), famous in legend as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Tower of Babel. The recently excavated *ziggurat* of Ur enables us to picture its sloping stairways and its terraces planted with rows of trees like the top of a wooded crag.

The priests of this temple would be able to tell us much that is no longer ascertainable. The Mesopotamians were keen antiquaries: Ashur-Bani-Pal the last great king of Assyria and Nabonidus the last king of Babylon both assembled libraries of ancient records; at Ur there was a museum of antiquities. The learned, who were probably all of the priestly class, had considerable knowledge of the history of their country and compiled long lists of its rulers; some of these have been found dating from Hammurabi's time or earlier; others were used much later by the priest Berossus, whose history of Mesopotamia in Greek, contemporary with Manetho's Egyptian history, is unfortunately also lost. As these lists give the length of reign of each king, they ought to provide an excellent framework for the history of Mesopotamia. Actually they are often misleading. They describe different dynasties as reigning successively in different cities according as each in turn claimed overlordship over 'the four quarters of the world'. But in fact it was a rare event in early Mesopotamian history for the rule of one city to be accepted without question by the rest. The ruler of a subordinate city was only entitled to call himself *patesi*—chief priest or 'vassal' of the city's god; but often several rulers at once laid claim to the higher title of 'king' and, as these questionable claims are sometimes recognized by the lists, the dynasties may overlap a good deal. The length of the reigns too is sometimes rather surprising. For instance, Enmenluanna of Bad-Tabira had what must be one of the longest reigns recorded anywhere outside India—no less than 43,200 years. But this was in the early days, before the Flood, which was only prevented from wiping out the human race by the timely warning of *Ea* the Water God to Utanapishtim,<sup>1</sup> who rescued a remnant of human and animal life in a specially constructed ship. After the Flood, when 'kingship came down again from heaven', reigns are reckoned only in centuries. Then, after Dumuzi (the Nature God, *Tammuz*) and Gilgamesh, whose vain quest of immortality inspired the masterpiece of Mesopotamian literature, we suddenly drop to reigns of normal human length. The next dynasty, the *First Dynasty of Ur*, begins with Mesannipadda, a historical figure known from contemporary monuments. According to the lists he ought to be dated long before 4000 B.C.; actually his date is probably later than 3000 B.C., contemporary with the beginning of the Egyptian Old Kingdom.

But, before penetrating further into the reedy swamp of Mesopotamian history, let us seek enlightenment from our friends the priests on its geographical setting. They might let us see a clay tablet containing a map of the 'Four Quarters of the World'. This would show that Babylon itself was in the land of Akkad; westward, as far as the Upper Sea, lay the land of the Amorites<sup>2</sup> through which

<sup>1</sup> Called in one text *Nah-molel*, whence perhaps Noah. A Mesopotamian origin seems to be well established for the story in *Genesis*, but not necessarily for all the widespread flood legends from China to Peru. Attempts to identify the traditional Deluge with any of the actual floods whose remains are traceable in the Euphrates valley remain inconclusive.

<sup>2</sup> A Sumerian poem (quoted in G. A. Barton: *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, p. 73) describes the Amorite, with patriotic exaggeration, as a mere food-gathering savage:

On the mountain the weapon is his companion;  
To catch meat he roams over the mountain;  
What is good he does not know;  
He eats uncooked meat;  
While he lives he has no house;  
His dead companion he does not bury.

we had passed and whence had come the ancestors of Hammurabi himself, northward, up the Tigris valley, were Ashur and Nineveh (afterwards successive capitals of Assyria); southward, downstream, lay Sumer; among the mountains to eastward dwelt those accursed barbarians the Elamites and (further north) the Guti. Civilization, they would add, had begun in Sumer. A tradition preserved in a fragment of Berossus relates that a monster named Oannes, half man, half fish, had swum out of the Persian Gulf and

'lived among men by day, but without taking food, and acquainted them with letters and sciences of every kind, and instructed them in the building of cities, the foundation of temples, legislation and geometry, sowing and harvesting—in short, all that makes life less savage—since when nothing further has been discovered'.

This legend has not yet come to light in any Sumerian text, but one tablet refers to a time when men 'went naked and browsed the grass like sheep and drank stream water'.

Whether their ancestors swam ashore with Oannes or descended from the mountains to which their *ziggurats* seem to aspire, the Sumerians must have been established in the marshes round the then mouth of the Euphrates by 3500 B.C., when the first certain traces appear of their distinctive temple architecture and writing. This developed out of mere picture-writing by a process surprisingly like the growth of the hieroglyphic script, including the continued use of ideograms along with phonetic symbols (generally representing syllables) and determinatives. There was no papyrus in Mesopotamia, and the written symbols were impressed in *cuneiform* ('wedge-shaped') lines on tablets of moist clay, which were afterwards dried in the sun or baked. A true cuneiform alphabet, consisting of a small number of phonetic signs, was used in Phoenicia as early as the 13th Century B.C., but it was soon ousted by the other Phoenician alphabet derived from Egyptian hieratics. The substitution of more portable and convenient writing materials for the clay tablet deprived the clumsy cuneiform script of its only advantage, and it dropped out of use about the beginning of the Christian era. But to this use of clay we owe the preservation of innumerable documents—contracts, accounts, private letters, prayers, magical and scientific formulae—that would assuredly have perished had they been entrusted to almost any other substance. Even in Egypt, which has the driest climate of any habitable country in the world, few early writings have survived except rock-carvings and papyri carefully buried in rock-cut tombs. This difference in the conditions of survival of documents probably accounts in part for the seeming contrast between the otherworldliness of Egypt and the businesslike efficiency of Mesopotamia.

By about 3000 B.C., when the historical period may be said to begin, the Sumerians rivalled the Egyptians as possessors of an adequate system of writing, apparently quite distinct in origin. In mathematics and astronomy, the two oldest sciences, they seem to have advanced appreciably further. Owing to their profound faith in astrology, they kept careful records of such portents as eclipses and comets so that they might learn by the event just what they portended. A study of these records enabled them in time to predict eclipses and other recurring phenomena, though without understanding their causes. The Sumerians also prided themselves on an elaborate system of divination by the entrails of animals slain in sacrifice, which must at least (like Egyptian embalming) have afforded some useful lessons in anatomy. But in the main Mesopotamian science tended, in the hands of the priesthood, to run into unfruitful channels and dry up at last in the barren desert of magic.

The Sumerians were also ahead of the Egyptians in metalwork, besides

possessing the notable inventions of the potter's wheel and wheeled vehicles. On the famous 'standard of Ur', found in one of the Royal Tombs, which are probably older than the *First Dynasty of Ur*, we see the troops going into action in four-wheeled chariots looking rather like the 'bogeys' a child makes out of a soap box and drawn by teams of doubtless mettlesome donkeys. The objects buried in these prehistoric tombs represent the high-water mark of Mesopotamian art. In later times it fell far short of the finest products of Egypt, and there is no Sumerian or Akkadian rival to the glories of Egyptian literature. On the other hand, the social and commercial organization revealed by the laws of Hammurabi far excels anything of which we have knowledge in the land of the Pharaohs.

*Sumer and Akkad: 3000 to 2000 B.C.*

We can observe some stages in the growth of this society. Mesopotamia is not a self-contained unit like Egypt, with well marked and easily defensible frontiers; exposed to the attacks of warlike 'Laphetite mountaineers from the north and no less warlike Semitic nomads from the Arabian desert to the south, it lies between the upper and the nether millstone. The settlers, whose dams and dikes turned the swamps of the lower Euphrates into rich ploughland, were naturally not allowed to reap the fruits of their toil in peace. In self-defence they developed a military organization which should have made them more than a match for barbarous invaders if only they had united among themselves. But there was in fact continual strife not only between the Sumerians and their Semitic-speaking Akkadian neighbours, who adopted the Sumerian civilization yet remained in many ways distinct, but among the Sumerian and Akkadian city-states themselves, for the short-lived glories of overlordship. And, not content to trade with neighbouring tribes for the many natural products in which the irrigated valley area was lacking, victorious cities used their military power to subdue and exploit productive regions bordering on the valley, incidentally imparting to the natives some dangerous lessons in the art of warfare.

During the 1,000 years or so that separate the purely Sumerian *First Dynasty of Ur* and the Amorite *First Dynasty of Babylon*, we see the growth and spread of civilization partly fostered and partly foiled by violent attempts at unification and expansion. Some half-dozen successive rulers of the Sumerian city of Lagash have left records of their work as temple-builders and diggers of canals. They were followed by the usurper Urukagina, who deserves to rank as the first social reformer in history, though he claims to be merely re-enacting the neglected ordinances of the city's god, *Nin-girsu*. He evidently relied for his position on popular support, and it was his boast that he 'gave liberty to his people'. He attempted to check the extortionate claims of the priests, and one of his ordinances enacts that:

'If the house of a great man adjoins the house of a (humble) subject of the king and the great man say to him "I will buy it", when he buys it, let him say to him "Pay in silver as much as satisfies my heart and my house."' (Quoted in *Cambridge Ancient History*, I, p. 387.)

Even so, if the poor man chose to cling to his house, as Naboth to his vineyard, there was to be no compulsory sale. But the peace of these reigns was broken by periodical wars with the neighbouring city of Umma, apparently originating in a dispute over a canal. Twice Lagash was victorious. The sequel is told in an inscription found among its ruins:

'The men of Umma . . . have shed blood in Abzu-ega, they have set fire to the temple of Gatum-dug; they have carried away the silver and the precious stones and have destroyed the statue . . . They have removed the

grain from the field of Nin-girsu . . . By the despoiling of Lagash they have sinned against the god Nin-girsu. The power that is come unto them from them shall be taken away. Of sin on the part of Urukagina, king of Girsu [a district of Lagash], there is none. But as for Lugal-zaggisi, *patesi* of Umma, may his goddess Nidaba bear this sin on her head!' (Quoted in Sir L. Woolley: *The Sumerians*, p. 71.)

The *patesi* of Umma followed up this success by a career of conquest that was cut short in its turn by a greater conqueror, Sargon of Agadé. The career of this Napoleonic figure was moulded by legend into a form that became traditional for all such national heroes (like the stereotyped life-history of the Greek *tyrant* or the modern dictator). In one fragment he is made to say:

'My mother was lowly, my father I knew not. . . . My lowly mother bore me in secret. She laid me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen she closed my door, she cast me into the river, which rose not over me. The river bore me up and carried me to Akki the ditcher. He lifted me out and reared me as his own son and made me a garden-lad. But the goddess Ishtar loved me, and for fifty-four years I held the kingship.' (Quoted in C. J. Gadd: *History of Ur*, p. 86.)

Starting evidently from humble beginnings, he established an Akkadian empire 'from the Lower to the Upper Sea', conquered Elam and Assyria and led a successful expedition into the heart of Asia Minor to assert the rights of some Mesopotamian merchants who complained of ill-treatment by a local ruler—an early example of foreign trade leading to imperial expansion. From these lands he introduced into Lower Mesopotamia exotic trees, vines, figs and roses. But 'in his old age all the lands revolted and besieged him in Agadé. . . . They revolted against him and he found no rest.'

Soon after Sargon's death (about 2500 B.C.?), Mesopotamia was overrun by one of the barbarous hill-folk. 'The royalty was taken to the hosts of Gutium, which had no king.' Chaos ensued. One scribe asks despairingly: 'Who was king? Who was not king?' Out of this chaos the Sumerian civilization emerges for the last time. Ur has a brilliant revival under its *Third Dynasty*. Then came the usual sequel. Astrologers noted the event with care and drew their own deductions:

'If the Yoke Star in its rising faces towards the West and looks towards the face of heaven and no wind blows, there will be famine; the dynasty will suffer the destruction of Ibi-Sin, king of Ur, who went in fetters unto Elam; they shall weep and perish.' (Quoted in *Cambridge Ancient History*, I, p. 460.)

This was the end of the Sumerians as an independent people, though their language was preserved by the priests of Semitic Mesopotamia for another 2,000 years as the indispensable medium for approaching the old gods. Their civilization long continued to dominate the Near East and has been woven into the cultural heritage of man.

### *The Age of Hammurabi*

The defeat of the Elamite conquerors of Ur by the Amorite rulers of Babylon brings us up to the period of our survey, which is illustrated by numerous contemporary records, above all the famous pillar on which are set forth the laws of Hammurabi.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translated with much illustrative matter in C. Edwards: *The World's Earliest Laws* and C. H. W. Johns: *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts and Letters*.

From the preamble to the code it appears that Hammurabi's empire rivalled that of Sargon in extent, and that he claimed to be the champion and benefactor of each of the cities of Sumer and Akkad, which are enumerated in detail. He is

'the far-seeing one, who has carefully provided pasture and drinking-places for Lagash and Girsu. . . . The promulgator of justice, the guider of the people, who has restored its tutelary deity to Ashur, etc.'

The code proper comprises 282 clauses, dealing with such varied matters as the punishment of witchcraft, brigandage and assault, and the regulation of workmen's wages. They do not touch homicide, which was presumably still a family matter to be avenged by the next of kin. They are chiefly concerned with the main problems of civil law deriving from the ownership of land and chattels—the tenure and conveyance of estates, leases and mortgages, sales, loans and contracts. The code is evidently a compilation of long-established practices, probably from the written or customary law of various cities, for enforcement throughout the empire. In comparison with surviving fragments of earlier Sumerian legislation, the new code is marked by a harsher sense of justice, appropriate to a less law-abiding people (a contrast like that of the Germanic codes of the Dark Ages with Roman Law): adulterers, disobedient slaves and those who sheltered runaways were punished more severely under the new dispensation.

Besides slaves, the code distinguishes two classes of freemen, *amelu* and *mushkenu* (an inequality that has no parallel in the legal theory of Egypt). The difference may have been primarily military, the *amelu* being the yeomen who formed the backbone of the regular army, whereas the *mushkenu*, who included artisans, merchants, surgeons and schoolmasters, were liable to conscription only in an emergency. The *amelu* was protected from bodily injury by a heavier fine than the *mushkenu*, but the latter was sometimes let off with a fine for offences punished in the more strictly disciplined *amelu* on the principle 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. The slaves were largely prisoners of war or their descendants or freemen enslaved, sometimes temporarily, for crime or debt. The killing or maiming of a slave was punished by a fine payable to the master, who in theory enjoyed the right to flog or brand. But this right cannot have been extensively exercised, as the slave had a legally defined status which raised him far above his brothers in Republican Rome or on the American plantations. He could raise a legal protest against his own sale, appear as a witness, do business in his own name, contract loans and buy his freedom. An extant tablet shows us a master manumitting a slave and adopting him as a son. If either parent was free, the offspring counted as free-born.

If slaves were more numerous than in contemporary Egypt, the ordinary peasant was probably further removed from serfdom. Much of the land was freehold, though presumably subject to some sort of taxation. The *amelu* often held land from the king by what would be called in the Middle Ages *knight service* or *serjeanty*—the obligation to serve on 'the way of the king' as a heavy-armed or light-armed soldier or as a policeman or in some other civil capacity. The king evidently had extensive estates. So had the temples, which throughout Sumerian times had administered a great deal of property and acted to some extent as banks: the temple of *Shamash* used to lend money to the sick, to be repaid only in the event of recovery. In these and other activities they resembled the Mediaeval monasteries, notably in their provision of schools for young priests and scribes. Some of the land was apparently held in common by village communities, but much of it was in the hands of wealthy landlords who let it out to tenant farmers. Here is a contract tablet illustrating the procedure by which new land was often brought under cultivation:

'From Shillashuna the proprietor, Marduk-nazir has leased 48 acres, part of the estate of the Adad Gate bounded by the land of Adad-bani. Marduk-nazir will clear and prepare the land in the first year. In the second year he will measure out 2 bushels of corn. In the third year he will measure out corn the same as the tenants of the adjoining fields.' (*Witnesses and date.*) (Quoted in Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 74.)

Clause 44 of the code enacts:

'If a man lease unreclaimed land for three years for cultivation, but has been lazy and has not tilled the field, in the fourth year he shall break up the field, hoe it, sow it and return it to the landlord. And he shall measure out to him 2 bushels of corn for each acre.'

There is no room here to discuss the detailed legislation governing the maintenance of the dams and ditches and regulation of the flow of irrigation water, without which land was useless; or the organization of the far-ranging commerce, financed by capitalists who made loans to travelling merchants on a profit-sharing basis and frequently settled their accounts by means of bills of exchange; or the inheritance of property, which was normally distributed equally among the surviving sons and the widow of the deceased, with special provision for daughters' dowries. But a word must be said on the position of women. The legal status of wives under the code was better in many ways than in 19th-Century England. Although the suitor paid a bride-price to the bride's parents (a relic of the marriage by purchase usual among nomads), this became her own property on marriage in addition to her dowry. The husband could not dispose of his wife's property without her consent. Divorce was possible for either party, though easier for the husband. If a man put his wife away on the grounds of ill health, he was bound to support her. Monogamy was the rule, though provision was made for concubines of an inferior but recognized status. One curious provision has become famous for its analogy to Abraham's dealings with Sarah and Hagar:

'If a man has married a priestess and she has given her husband a female slave who bears children, and afterwards that slave ranks herself with her mistress because she has born children, her mistress may not sell her for silver. She may be fettered and counted among the slaves.' (146.)

There existed also (as at some Hindu temples to this day) a numerous class of women who dedicated their virginity to the gods in a very different fashion from Christian nuns or the virgin priestesses of other religions. There can be little doubt that the lower ranks at any rate of these temple women were prostitutes, though their sanctity preserved them from the stigma attaching to this class in most societies. Some of them were allowed to marry, but their children were reckoned as children of the god, not of the husband. There is no trace in the Code of the seclusion and veiling of women, characteristic of the East in later times, but its beginnings appear in an Assyrian law of c. 1100 B.C. The legal position of women could be illustrated from many prosaic and businesslike marriage contracts. The deeper foundation on which the relation of the sexes must always have rested appears more plainly in this, the first recorded love letter:

'To Bibiya, Gimil-Marduk sends this message. May Shamash and Marduk give you health for my sake. I have sent to ask after your health. Let me know how you are. I have arrived at Babylon and do not see you. I am very unhappy. Send news of your coming to cheer me up. Come in the month of Markheswan. Keep well always for my sake.' (Quoted in Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 336.)

It is possibly the same Gimil-Marduk who figures, in a less favourable light, in the following letter from Hammurabi himself to one of his viceroys or governors:

'Sheb-Sin, the scribe of the merchants, has reported to me that Enubi-Marduk has laid hands on the moneys due for the temple of Bit-il-kittim from the Tigris district and Gimil-Marduk on the moneys due for the same temple from the region of Rakhabu, and they have not paid over the full amount, but the palace has exacted the full sum from him.' (Quoted in L. W. King: *Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi*, III, p. 50.)

Nothing further is known of Gimil-Marduk, but his fellow defaulter Enubi-Marduk was afterwards peremptorily summoned to the royal presence to give an account of himself.

Other extant letters of Hammurabi, ordering prompt inquiry into a bribery charge, restitution of property, release of men wrongly set to forced labour or attention to the repair of a canal, bear out his reputation for just and efficient government. Most of the surviving correspondence of the period is bald and practical, but the following letter, though strictly to the point, introduces another touch of the human element:

'To his father, Zimri-erah sends this message. May Shamash and Marduk give you health for ever. I have sent to ask how you are. I am staying at Dur-Sin on the Kashtim-sikirim canal. There is no meat fit to eat. I am sending you two thirds of a shekel of silver. For this money send some nice fish and something to eat.' (Quoted in Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 336.)

In the Babylon in which such letters were passing to and fro we shall not feel ourselves wholly strangers. If certain things strike us as incongruously barbarous, we may ask ourselves how they compare with the burning of witches, disembowelling of felons and hanging of poachers that have not long gone out of fashion, and whether there may not be features even in contemporary life that might occasion a like surprise in a visitor from Babylon.

### *The Gods of this World*

If we turn from these details of everyday life and try to take a broad view of man and his universe as they appeared to Babylonian eyes, we shall find our sources far from adequate. Few of the early cuneiform records throw more than an indirect light on this problem. The most revealing documents are late copies of undated texts, of which not many are likely to be older in their present form than about the 13th Century B.C. By this date the Sumerian stratum of ideas had been overlain by many intrusive elements. It need not be assumed, however, that cultural evolution was more rapid or discontinuous in Mesopotamia than in Egypt. In both countries the old gods died hard.

In Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, men saw the world as governed by superhuman powers, partly controllable by magic but so like their human rulers that it was safer on important occasions to try similar methods of appeasement. From the first the Sumerians were villagers concerned with the life-giving powers embodied in their crops. Each community personified these powers as a deity, at first perhaps of indeterminate attributes and even of uncertain sex but later more clearly pictured as a heavenly king complete with queen. These deities were always portrayed in human form. Their worship was the central expression of corporate life. As Sumer remained politically less united than Egypt, these local gods were never definitely combined in one pantheon, and therefore not so clearly differentiated in character and function. The city of Nippur, however,



played a part like that of the Egyptian Heliopolis, and its god *En-lil* was generally recognized as son of Heaven (*Anu*) and father of the other gods, till he was ousted by *Marduk* of Babylon. *En-lil*'s consort *Nin-lil* gave unity to the widespread cult of a Mother Goddess, who was readily identified with the Semitic-Akkadian *Ishtar* (Canaanite *Astarté*). With the growth of astrology, the priests associated these deities with the heavenly bodies—*Marduk* and *Ishtar*, for instance, with the planets Jupiter and Venus. *Sîn* of Ur is linked in our earliest records with the moon, and *Babbar* (Semitic *Shamash*) with the sun. There are also traces of a clash, such as developed in Egypt, between these potentially universal objects of worship and the more strictly local gods.

Alongside the great gods, who were worshipped as patrons and almost as personifications of the several states, there were many lesser deities or spirits, more specialized in their functions and more approachable, who probably counted for more in the life of the ordinary man. Over 3,000 divine names are recorded. They were especially in demand as protectors against the prevalent plague of evil spirits or demons. The political decline of the city-states led (as later in Greece) to a decline of the state religions. This paved the way on the one hand for universal monotheism, on the other hand for a more private and personal religion. There is evidence at Ur, for instance, of a growing worship of 'family gods' or guardian spirits in private chapels attached to the dwelling-houses.

The Sumerian attitude to death may originally have been very like the Egyptian. The Royal Tombs at Ur (c. 3000 B.C.?) compare closely with Egypt, not only in the artistic perfection of their grave furniture but in the obsession with the hereafter to which they bear witness. But in Mesopotamia the funeral rites later dwindled away to simple interment. The priests held out no prospect, even to kings and heroes, of any afterlife except in a joyless Underworld (*Aralû*). This is described in an early Sumerian text, illustrating the myth of the dying Vegetation God, as a place of darkness and dust. Here there was neither reward nor punishment, though the hardest fate was suffered by those who had no children to make offerings at their grave. The central theme of the *Gilgamesh* story is expressed quite bluntly:

When the gods created man,  
They ordained death for mankind;  
Life they took in their own hand.

The moral follows logically:

Day and night be merry,  
Daily celebrate a feast! . . .  
Look joyfully on the babe that clutches thy hand,  
Be happy with the wife in thine arms!

Hence the typical Mesopotamian prayer is for worldly prosperity and long life. As in Egypt, two rival roads to blessedness were advocated, one magical and one moral; but the goal was placed in this life.

We might therefore expect to find the Mesopotamians vividly and gratefully aware of the joy and beauty of the world. This mood is in fact occasionally expressed, as in this psalm to the Moon God, *Sîn*:

When thy word riseth aloft like the wind, it maketh to flourish meadow and spring;  
When thy word sinketh down to earth, the green herbage is brought forth.  
Thy word maketh fat stall and herd, spreadeth out the living creatures;  
Thy word bringeth forth truth and righteousness, so that men speak the truth;  
Thy word is the distant sky, the covered earth which no one seeth through.  
Thy word, who comprehendeth it? Who is equal to it?  
Look upon thy house! Look upon thy city! Look upon Ur!

(Quoted in J. H. Breasted: *The Dawn of Conscience*, p. 339.)

On the whole, however, the religious literature of Mesopotamia, like much of its art, has a somewhat grim and sombre cast. The numerous prayers to avert destruction from a city are a reminder that life was generally less peaceful and secure here than in the sheltered Nile valley. Moreover, the worshippers seem haunted by a sense of undefined sin.

O god, known or unknown, my transgressions are many, great are my sins . . .  
The transgressions I have committed, I know not.  
The sin I have done, I know not.

(Quoted in M. Jastrow: *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 330; cf. p. 368.)

We also find detailed enumerations of specific sins, like those in the *Book of the Dead*, ranging from the breach of magical taboos (eating what is not clean) to obvious social misdemeanours (bloodshed, theft, using false weights) and even such subtle forms of guilt as 'saying "Yes" with the mouth but "No" with the heart'.

The gods were regularly invoked as upholders of what the community deemed to be right: one of the earliest texts mentions a God of Justice, and the all-seeing Sun God (as in Egypt) was often conceived as a judge. Like the Hebrew prophets some centuries later, the Mesopotamian psalmists maintained in the teeth of the evidence that the divine justice was manifest in the earthly fate of individuals and their descendants, as in this hymn to the Sun God:

He who does not take a bribe, who espouses the cause of the weak,  
He is well pleasing to Shamash: he will live long.  
The careful judge who renders a just judgement  
Prepares for himself a palace; a princely residence is his dwelling. . . .  
Like water of the eternal well-springs there is everlasting seed  
To him who deals piously and well and who knows not deceit . . .  
But he who is basely minded is recorded with the writing stylus;  
And as for them that do evil, their seed hath no permanence.

(Quoted in J. H. Breasted: *The Dawn of Conscience*, p. 341.)

The discrepancy between this comforting theory and the facts was plain to the more thoughtful—as, for instance, to the writer known as 'the Babylonian Job', who is driven by unmerited suffering to exclaim: 'The plan of a god is full of mystery—who can understand it?' But such speculation did not trouble the ordinary man in a society which could explain every vicissitude of life as caused by the malevolence of a demon or the efficacy of a charm.

Despite occasional parallels, there is really not much spiritual affinity between the culture of Mesopotamia, even in its Semitic form, and the culture of the Semites of Palestine. Or rather, Mesopotamian culture gives us some idea of what the Hebrews were rebelling against. While the 'Law of Moses' in its social aspect is obviously related to the Hammurabi code, its spirit is transformed by a wholly different attitude to religion. Similarly, the authors of *Genesis* drew some of their ideas, perhaps at many removes, from Mesopotamian mythology. The 'darkness' (Hebrew *tehom*) that was upon the face of the waters in the Biblical account of the Creation is an echo of the Sumerian goddess *Tiāmat*, who was cleft in two by Marduk, so that one half became heaven and the other earth—a typical contrast between dignified simplicity and that riot of uncouth imagery, at once dull and extravagant, which is the keynote of Mesopotamian art. Perhaps the artists found in this crazy world of winged bulls and lion-headed eagles an outlet for lawless impulses frustrated by the rigid structure of Mesopotamian society.

## VII

## THE SURVEY COMPLETED: THE FAR EAST AND EUROPE

IN the world of the 20th Century B.C., Twelfth Dynasty Egypt and the Babylon of Hammurabi are bright islands of a civilization already over 1,000 years old, fitfully but often vividly illumined by the written word. In the encircling gloom we dimly discern at least three comparable centres of original civilization, separated and surrounded by a large area throughout which men had already passed from a life of food-gathering to one based on agriculture or nomadism. But here any attempt at exact delineation is out of the question: the best we can hope for is an outline sketch pieced together (with many missing pieces) from archaeological fragments arranged in general harmony with the later distribution of races, cultures and languages—a hazy, impersonal background for the clearer shapes and colours of better documented ages. It will at least be a reminder that the civilizations of the Far East and Europe had a long and lively childhood behind them, however dark and dead it may be to us.

*The Indus Valley*

Objects excavated from low levels (2500 B.C. and earlier) in Mesopotamia include several engraved seals of foreign workmanship which are now known to have travelled by ship or caravan, or by gradual passage from tribe to tribe, from the valley of the Indus. The authors of Volume I of the *Cambridge History of India* assume that, before the Aryan<sup>1</sup> invasion (c. 1500 B.C.?), the natives of India had a very low standard of civilization. In the early Aryan poems they are contemptuously described as *Dasyus* ('slaves'), dark-skins and flat-noses; if they also appear as living in towns, these could easily be explained away as rude forts surrounded by earthworks or stockades. In the very year (1922) in which this volume appeared, excavations were beginning at Mohen-jo Daro in the Indus valley and some 400 miles further north at Harappa in the Punjab which show that, more than 1,000 years before the supposed date of the Aryan invasion, the natives of north-western India were living in carefully planned and drained cities of substantial houses built of red fire-baked brick whose remains (according to the excavator Sir John Marshall) suggest 'the ruins of some present-day working town of Lancashire'. Whether the industrious inhabitants were thinking what Manchester thinks today and London will think tomorrow, we do not know; their thoughts remain locked up in a script that we cannot read. So far no lengthy texts have been found—only inscribed seals and such. Probably more perishable writing materials were used than the clay tablets of Mesopotamia.

The area covered by this civilization was twice that of Old Kingdom Egypt and nearly four times that of Sumer and Akkad together: it embraced a great part (perhaps the whole) of the valley of the Indus and its tributaries of the *Punjab* ('Five Waters'), with outliers further west in Baluchistan; it is not yet known whether it extended east into the Ganges valley. Over all this area the material culture was remarkably uniform. It was even more remarkably uniform in time: the seven levels excavated at Mohen-jo Daro (perhaps covering the period c. 3000-2500 B.C.) are scarcely distinguishable, except that the later buildings are inferior to the earlier ones. It is evident that a civilization so highly developed, widespread and stable must have a long past behind it, so that it may quite conceivably be older than either the Egyptian or the Mesopotamian. Like the Mesopotamians, and unlike the Egyptians, the Indus people used wheeled vehicles:

For the meaning of the term 'Aryan', see p. 92.

their carts were of the pattern still used in the district. Without such elaborate irrigation (which was probably less needed in the relatively moist climate of the Indus valley in those days), they cultivated many of the same plants—wheat, barley, dates, etc.—with the addition of cotton but apparently not yet rice. They had domesticated many of the same animals—sheep, camels, possibly also horses, but apparently not donkeys. They had also tamed those typically Indian animals the elephant, the buffalo and the humped ox (zebu), and probably the jungle fowl, the ancestor of our cocks and hens. In metalwork they were generally inferior to the Sumerians, though a bronze saw from Mohen-jo Daro is the most efficient tool of its kind known before Roman times. Much of their pottery was poor stuff—mechanical and mass-produced rather than primitive—but some was excellent and quite distinctive. They were fond of toys, which (judging from the number found in waste pipes) they used to take into the bath with them. They also shared the traditional Indian taste for dice and board-games.

The buildings at Mohen-jo Daro, though excellently constructed, are bald and undecorative; they may perhaps have been covered with a painted plaster which has since perished. The most striking one found so far is a large public bath, perhaps used for the ritual bathing still practised by the Hindus; otherwise there is no recognizable temple. Another large but unimpressive building may be a palace or seat of administration. Another is possibly a market hall. The abundance and accuracy of standard weights bears witness to a highly organized commercial life, and some of the rare stones found are thought to be imports from far afield; the jadeite may even hail from Burma or Tibet. Certain gold beads closely resemble beads from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Troy. The general impression of a rather bourgeois civilization is redeemed by some beautifully carved seals and statuettes; the best of these show a more perfect modelling of the human form than is found anywhere till the rise of Classical Greek art.

In the light of these startling and wholly unexpected revelations, which may be only the prelude to still more revolutionary discoveries, European scholars have had to readjust their whole conception of Indian history. The Indians themselves have always maintained the immense antiquity of their own civilization, but hitherto without producing any very convincing evidence. The history of India has been written (generally with a good deal of prejudice) by her invaders. Among all the vast classical literature of India, in several languages, there is practically nothing that can be classed as a work of history. Kings and teachers whose names are household words throughout India cannot be fitted into a chronological framework without a margin of many years, even of centuries. The whole bent of Hindu philosophy has led men to despise time as an illusion—at best a mere speck in eternity. The total reign of 241,200 years of the eight Mesopotamian kings before the Flood is a drop in the bucket compared with the *kalpas* and *mahā-kalpas* of Indian reckoning, in which the number of grains of sand on the shores of all the seas of the world is no more than a unit. An Indian scholar has recently published, amid the acclaim of orthodox Hindus, a book designed to prove that the *Vedas* (the sacred hymns of Hinduism) were composed in the course of several remote geological periods extending over many millions of years. In the face of such fantasies, Western scholars were (as the event has shown) unduly sceptical. But the India of Mohen-jo Daro is not the Aryan India of Hindu tradition. Rather, it is evidence that, as had sometimes been suspected, Hinduism contains large pre-Aryan elements which were at first swamped by the Aryan conquest but have since struggled to the surface. The Hindu god *Shiva*, who does not appear by name in the *Vedas* and has been thought to be pre-Aryan, is apparently represented with some of his characteristic modern attributes on a seal found at Mohen-jo Daro. The modern Hindu rites associated with the *lingam* (the phallic emblem of generation) are equally unknown to the *Vedas*, but had their counterpart in the

Indus Civilization. Even the *swastika* (from Sanskrit *su-asti*, 'well-being') is non-Aryan in origin. In many other details the same sort of survival may be inferred; and numerous objects found at Mohen-jo Daro and Harappa, ranging from boats to hair-combs, are of modern Indian type.

It is not yet clear whether the Indus Civilization was destroyed by the Aryans or had already fallen a prey to earlier, unrecorded invaders, perhaps before 2000 B.C. All the evidence suggests that it was either a quite unwarlike civilization or else, like the Roman Empire, had its armed outposts far from the peaceful centre. The upper levels at Mohen-jo Daro (c. 2500 B.C.?) show signs of degeneration, and some of the latest inhabitants seem to have died a violent death. But there is not even a legend to hint at the manner of its passing. And yet, paradoxically enough, though the ancient gods of Nile and Euphrates have long since been forgotten, their contemporaries of the Indus still have an honoured place among the million gods of Hindustan.

### *The Hoang-Ho Valley*

Eastward and northward of India lies another centre of ancient civilization, parted from it by leagues of waterless desert and range after range of the highest mountains in the world. Even today the direct route between India and China is rarely attempted. In ancient days, though the mountains must have been at least as impassable as they are now, the route through central Asia was less forbidding; in many parts of Chinese Turkestan (Sinkiang) the desert sands have encroached on the ruins of cities that must once have stood in well watered country. Nomadic tribes with the aid of horse or camel could have carried the first elements of civilization from north-western India to northern China across the connecting grasslands as their successors 3,000 years later carried Buddhism from its old to its new home.

After the remote epoch of the Peking submen, little is known of Chinese prehistory, though some skeletons dating from the late Old Stone Age are said to differ little from European remains of like date. In the Hoang-Ho valley, for perhaps two or three thousand years before 3000 B.C., men physically indistinguishable from the present Mongoloid population of China (who are related in language, and presumably in race, to the Siamese and other peoples of south-eastern Asia) had been living in pit dwellings with 'beehive' roofs of timber, cultivating leaf and root crops and later also millet with digging-stick and hoe. They kept dogs and pigs and made rude pottery. Their culture had much in common with that of Europe in the 'New Stone Age', and probably sprang from a common ultimate source in the Nearer East. After 3000 B.C. fresh cultural elements seem to have filtered in from the West.

Besides a characteristic Painted Ware, these probably included wheeled vehicles and an advanced technique of bronze-casting. But the subsequent development of Chinese pottery, which was to make 'China ware' a term for the finest porcelain, was not a continuation of this imported style but a revival of the native tradition. Chinese bronzes equally bear the stamp of an original culture. It seems that even at this early date the Chinese possessed the power, which they have so often exercised since, of assimilating imported arts and ideas to their own organic way of life.

Though China has learnt much from India, the two civilizations are sundered by Himalayas of the spirit no less impassable than the physical barriers of mountain and desert. This is well instanced by the difference between Indian and Chinese tradition. Instead of the misty immensities of Hindu speculation, China presents us with coherent and systematic annals extending back to the 9th Century B.C. and fairly credible traditions going back a further 2000 years. After a clearly fabulous prelude, the standard chronology assigns a reign of 116 years (2852-

2738 B.C.) to Fu-Hsi, the legendary inventor of writing, the calendar and musical instruments and first domesticator of the 'six animals' (horse, ox, sheep, fowl, dog and pig). His successor was the first to cultivate the 'five grains' (rice, two kinds of millet, wheat and soya). If these and their immediate successors are to rank as mere mortals, their reigns obviously need a little pruning; but the date implied for the beginnings of Chinese civilization is in itself eminently plausible.

The plausibility of a tradition does not of course prove its truth, especially in a country where even myths have an air of reasonableness. The Chinese annals, even of a much later date, can seldom be checked from any external source. Early monuments are equally lacking. Chinese buildings have usually been flimsy wooden structures that perish and leave no trace: it is even said that the oldest buildings now standing in China are later than some of the Norman castles and churches in England. Probably the oldest authentic documents preserved by the literary tradition are later than the fall of the Shang Dynasty (1722 B.C.?). During the present century, however, excavations at An-Yang, the Shang capital, have brought to light many thousands of ox bones and tortoise shells, on which are engraved such questions as 'Shall we have a good millet harvest this year?' They were baked till they cracked, and the shape assumed by the cracks afforded an oracular answer to the question. These inscriptions, as shown by their references to various Shang rulers, extend over the last two Centuries of that Dynasty. The excavations have also confirmed in many ways the classical Chinese tradition. In other respects, however, it will not stand the test of criticism: for instance, it almost certainly exaggerates the power of the Shang kings in making them rulers of a unified state embracing most of North China.

For the preceding Hsia Dynasty (2205-1765 B.C.?), there is as yet no archaeological evidence whatever. In view of the part played by kings in the other river-valley civilizations as controllers of the flood waters, it is interesting to note that Yü, the founder of this Dynasty, is said to have saved the country from the first recorded of the many floods of the Hoang-Ho, China's life-blood and 'China's sorrow'. 'If it had not been for Yü,' as one Chinese writer puts it, 'we should all have been fishes.' Here, however, we are still in the realm of legend. The massive conservatism of historical China tempts us to believe that many elements of that culture which we shall meet in our next survey existed in germ in the 20th Century B.C. But that belief must await the confirmation of the archaeologist.

Beyond China lies Japan, then still in the New Stone Age (no trace of earlier man has been found there). Further east again lies America, to which a somewhat similar culture was probably introduced by Mongoloid immigrants by way of Bering Strait about this time. Whether pioneer bands had penetrated to the New World 10,000 or even 20,000 years before remains an open question, as does the occurrence of subsequent contact between Asia and America. Further south, Australia had been reached from south-eastern Asia (perhaps at a time when the mainland extended as far as the Timor Sea) by primitive hunting tribes bringing with them man's first friend the dog; for all we know, they were living much the same life then as when Captain Cook sailed into Botany Bay not 200 years ago. New Zealand and most of the smaller Pacific islands were probably not peopled for another 2,000 years and more.

### *The Northern Grasslands: the Problem of the Aryans*

But we must turn our backs on the Pacific and head westward once more across the interminable grasslands of northern Asia. The earliest known inhabitants of this region were the tent-dwelling nomads—Huns, Mongols, Turks—men whose true country was the back of a horse'. These peoples have created little except in the sphere of military organization and equipment, but they have borrowed much, materially and spiritually, from their more settled neighbours.

When we cross the Urals, we meet, for the first time in our survey, a people who were to bulk large in the later history of civilization, first as destroyers, later also as preservers and creators. For here we enter the 'cradle of the Aryan race' or (in more scientific language) the probable habitat of the hypothetical speakers of the conjectural Indo-European parent language. On this complicated and highly controversial subject it would be rash to attempt to do more than note a few facts that seem to be well established and suggest the hypothesis which (in the present state of knowledge) seems best to account for them.

A study of the languages spoken today in Europe, and by people of European ancestry elsewhere, shows that with few exceptions they represent modifications of one original 'parent' language, from which Armenian, Persian and the languages of northern India are also derived. How can we be sure of this unity of origin, and what can we infer from it?

Let us first consider what happens when a country is conquered and occupied by people speaking a foreign language. Very often the native tongue survives, more or less modified, as English has survived the Norman Conquest but has been modified by the addition of a large number of French words to its vocabulary and a certain simplification of its grammar. Under different conditions, which cannot be precisely defined, it is the language of the invaders that survives. In Ireland, for instance, Gaelic was completely ousted except from the extreme west (the current attempt to revive it is one of those incidents that remind us we are not dealing with immutable laws of nature). But the English spoken by an Irishman, even one who knows no Gaelic, still retains many of the peculiarities of pronunciation characteristic of the native tongue, besides a few actual Gaelic words and many turns of speech expressive of traditional habits of thought. Occasionally, perhaps, the two elements become so fused that we have a mixed language. And of course similar modifications occur on a lesser scale wherever we have intercourse between speakers of different languages: the English still continue to 'borrow' (or rather 'imitate') French words, though it is over five centuries since their aristocracy habitually spoke French; and of late years their neighbours have been returning the compliment and enriching their own vocabulary with *le bouledogue*, *le tramway* and *le sandwich*.

Now let us consider the opposite case—when two groups of people speaking the same language become separated. It is obvious that the English spoken in the British Isles and that spoken in North America have already diverged a good deal; the American dialect, owing to its more varied foreign contacts and less conservative atmosphere, has changed more rapidly than the stay-at-home one, but it has also conserved words and forms that the other has lost (e.g. *guess* in the sense of 'feel sure', *gotten*, etc.) and has escaped much modern English slang. Actually the forces holding the two dialects together—travel, printed books, radio, talkies, etc.—are so strong that the gulf is never likely to grow very wide. In the absence of these links, it might already have widened past the limits of mutual intelligibility. So, when contact between the Latin-speaking provinces of the Roman Empire lapsed, their current speech developed along divergent lines; many local dialects resulted, of which some few have been standardized as the national languages of France, Spain, Roumania, etc. The dialects of the Italian home country (especially isolated Sardinia) have changed on the whole least.

The forces that determine the direction of change in a language are largely unknown. We know that the unintentional and almost mechanical processes of phonetic change (i.e. change in pronunciation) follow regular laws, so that, if Latin *mātrēm* becomes *mère* in the dialect of northern Gaul, we may confidently expect that *frātrēm* will become *frère*. And we can see that the different spoken sounds of a language are linked together, so that the entire phonetic system changes as a whole. And we can partly explain these changes as due to economy of effort

—difficult combinations of sounds are gradually changed to easier ones. But the reasons why certain 'laws' of sound change operate only at certain times and places are quite obscure. Still more incalculable (because dependent on vagaries of the human will) are changes in meaning, the adoption of new words and the dropping out of old ones: in Italian and Spanish we might expect a form '*fradre*' to match *madre*; instead we find *fratello* ('little brother') and *hermano* ('brother german'). The more or less conscious efforts of the speakers to achieve simplicity and regularity are perpetually being offset by the anomalous results of phonetic change (e.g. in English the plural in -s has been driving out forms like *brethren* and *shoon*; but for phonetic reasons the -s plural of *knife* is not '*knifes*'). The commonest and most indispensable words in a language (e.g. the personal pronouns) tend to be the most conservative and to preserve ancient irregularities.

A great part of the resemblance between English and French is due to 'borrowing': Modern English *friar* has developed out of Middle English *frere*, an imitation of French *frère*; English *fraternity* and French *fraternité* are both adapted from literary Latin *fraternitatem*. But other resemblances cannot be so explained: English *I* and *me*, German *ich* and *mich*, clearly correspond to French *je* and *me*, which represent modifications of Latin *egō* and *mē*. In Greek the forms are *egō* and *mē*, in Sanskrit *ahām* and *mā*. Words like these are not likely to be borrowed. Moreover, the differences in form are often such as could not be explained by borrowing. English *brother* could not be an imitation or modification of French *frère* (or of Latin *frāterem* or its Nominative form *frāter*) or *vice versa*. But if we postulate an imaginary original '*bhrātēr*', we can easily account for *brother* and *frāter*, as well as Sanskrit *bhrātar*, Greek *phrātēr*, Irish *braithir*, Russian *brat*, Persian *berader*, etc. And these supposed changes work out with a beautiful regularity: under similar conditions, Sanskrit *bh* will always correspond to Greek *ph*, Latin *f*, Germanic, Keltic and Slavonic *b*; there is a similar sequence with *dh*, and so on. Moreover, we are able to follow the history of these languages back 1,000, 2,000, some of them perhaps 3,000 years, and the further back we get the closer does the resemblance become. In detail the evidence for the existence of a parent 'Indo-European' language is overwhelming and undisputed.

The much abused word *Aryan* was adopted last century from the title *ārya* ('noble') applied to themselves by the Sanskrit-speaking invaders of India (cf. Old Persian *Airya*, whence *Iran*). More cautious scholars tend to avoid it, except as applied to the Indian or Indo-Iranian branch of the family; but it is so much more pleasing than the cumbersome words *Indo-European* and *Indo-Germanic* that it seems a pity not to keep the word in its wider use. Though present-day men cannot be classed as Aryan or non-Aryan in any intelligible sense except the purely linguistic one in which an English-speaking Negro is Aryan, we may take it as certain that somewhere at some time there existed a group of men living in intimate contact with one another and speaking a language of which all later Aryan languages are modifications. As their descendants dispersed over an ever wider area, they must have mingled (peacefully or otherwise) with people of alien speech, in whose mouths the common tongue assumed ever more divergent forms. So in India today Aryan speech replaces non-Aryan with little or no accompanying change of physical type.

A comparison of words common to all or most of the Aryan languages proves that the original 'Aryans' were not mere food-gathering savages. They were familiar with many domesticated animals—horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, dogs, but not donkeys or camels. They must have practised some sort of tillage, probably growing barley and a kind of wheat. They built wooden houses, made wheeled vehicles and probably worked (or at least knew) copper. There are common Aryan words for snow and winter, but none for sea or fish. The wild fauna and



flora suggest a northern habitat—wolves and bears, beech, birch and willow. If tree names could be accepted at their face value, they would help considerably to define the region in which the common language was spoken, but migrating tribes may easily be guilty of botanical inaccuracy: corresponding to English *beech* and Latin *fāgus* is Greek *phēgos*, which however means 'oak'. Similarly, the Aryans appear to have made a drink of fermented honey (English *mead*, Sanskrit *madhu*), but the Greeks applied the word *methy* to the non-Aryan drink wine. Several indications suggest that the Aryans were to some extent nomadic. Aryan religion was probably an ill-defined nature-worship with little trace of the fertility cults of the cultivator; their gods certainly included a Sky Father (Sanskrit *Dyāus pitā*, Latin *Dies-piter* or *Ju-piter*, Greek *Zeus*, Norse *Tyr*, English *Tiu*, the patron of *Tues-day*). There is nothing to suggest the elaborate ritual and organized priesthood of the old centres of civilization (though the Roman *flāmen* may have a common prototype with the Indian *brāhman*). There was certainly a common word for 'king' (*rēx*, *rājā*, etc.), but without a knowledge of writing there can have been no very highly organized monarchy.

This picture of a simple semi-nomadic folk accords well with our knowledge of the various Aryan-speaking peoples when they first come on the stage of history. Historic and linguistic data also combine to place the Aryan 'home' somewhere in the northern grasslands. Hungary is a possibility; so is Turkestan. But a midway region north of the Black Sea is on the whole the most probable. It is likely that many elements of Aryan culture, such as a knowledge of the wheel, were derived from Mesopotamia, and some Aryan 'culture words', notably those connected with metal, seem to have been borrowed from Sumerian: Sumerian *gu* (ox), for instance, suggests the hypothetical Aryan '*gwōus*' (Sanskrit *gāus*, English *cow*, Latin *bōs*, *bovem*, whence French *bœuf*, English *beef*). The degree of culture reached seems to suggest that the dispersal of the Aryans could scarcely have begun much earlier than 3000 B.C. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that certain branches had broken away before 2000 B.C.

### *The Kingdom of Minos*

The quest for European origins is immensely furthered, if not exactly simplified, by the mounting piles of archaeological data. The progress of excavation already makes it possible to trace in some detail the spread of material culture before 2000 B.C. from Egypt and Mesopotamia northwards and westwards across Europe, where natives and immigrants combined to form the settled agricultural communities typical of the New Stone Age and the Bronze Age. But the Europeans at first showed little capacity for higher civilization except in the island of Crete. Here, under the stimulus of traders and probably also colonists from Asia and Egypt, they began about 3000 B.C. to develop a highly original civilization, which at the time of our survey was in full bloom. The Cretans were masters of domestic architecture; there is a story that a sanitary engineer, who was recently being shown round the ruins of the great palace at Knossos, stopped suddenly at the sight of a device for regulating the flow of drainage water from a roof and exclaimed: 'But they *can't* use that! My firm have just bought the patent rights.' They decorated walls and vases with paintings whose feeling for nature is as remarkable as their sense of design. So long as the scrappy remnants of their writing remain undeciphered, an album of photographs will sum up our knowledge of their civilization more adequately than volumes of letterpress.

In general, if not in archaeological details, there is a striking parallel between Cretan civilization and that of the Indus valley. In contrast to Egypt and Mesopotamia, they both make greater provision for human comfort; the dwelling-house of the ordinary citizen is not completely overshadowed by the temple and the palace; the surplus wealth and manpower of the community is not so

exclusively devoted to the service of the state and its rulers, human and divine. There is a suggestion too of more security, less preoccupation with the all-important problem of war, more chance to behave freely and naturally. The Cretan artist chooses for his theme a cup-bearer, a boy gathering irises, a gay crowd of men and women watching bull-baiting in the arena. Life was a little sophslicated perhaps, even 'decadent', but not dogged by the demon of fear. Like the Indus Civilization again, the Cretan is known to us chiefly as a plant from whose seed a still more brilliant civilization was to spring after the parent had withered and been ploughed in and forgotten. It is true that certain memories lingered on in Greek tradition: stories clustered round Minos king of Crete (after whom the Cretan civilization has been christened 'Minoan') and Daedalus the cunning craftsman, who made the *Labyrinth* and dancing floor at Knossos besides *robots* and a flying machine. But these legends were so vague that the discoveries of Sir Arthur Evans at Knossos early in the present century came as a complete surprise to students of Greek history. Since then, it has become possible to explain many features of Greek civilization (as of Indian) by the re-emergence of older institutions and ideas, especially in the sphere of religion, that seemed for a while to be swamped under the Aryan tide. It is significant too that most Greek mountains, rivers and even cities (Athens, Mycenae, Corinth) bear names that are non-Greek and apparently non-Aryan, and the Greek language contains a large foreign element, including many 'culture words' and names of Mediterranean plants. Some of these were borrowed independently into Latin and other languages, and some have found their way into English. It is a pleasing thought that the Minoan artist, who painted with so sure a touch the wild flowers of Crete, may have bequeathed from his long-forgotten tongue such familiar words as *fig, vine, olive, mint, hyacinth, lily, rose and violet*.

In some features Greek civilization contrasts, not always favourably, with Minoan: for instance, the status of women appears to have deteriorated, as it did between the eras of Sumerian and Semitic domination in Mesopotamia. Other features show a resemblance that may be due not to survival or re-emergence but to the geographical background. Instead of vast plains and river valleys in which the need for a common irrigation policy makes unification almost a necessity, the setting of Aegean civilization from Minoan times onwards was a cluster of small islands (the projecting peaks of a sunken mountain range) or of tiny patches of plain isolated by barren hills. In this setting unity could be achieved, if at all, only under strong external pressure. Sea-ways are here far more important than land-ways, and seamen are poor material for a totalitarian state.

### *Seaways and Landways*

Tradition describes 'Minos' (perhaps a generic name like Pharaoh) as a ruler of the seas. Archaeology has confirmed this by revealing traces of 'Minoan' influence not only over the Aegean islands and the Greek mainland, where colonies seem to have been early established, but also at least as far west as Sicily. Probably the Minoans also contributed to the surprisingly fine craftsmanship (especially in metal) of Bronze Age Spain, though the beginnings of this *Iberian* culture may be due to contact with Egypt by way of North Africa. The Iberian language, which was certainly non-Aryan, may survive in Basque; its only written monuments are a few inscriptions of Roman times. The prehistoric Iberians specialized in the construction of mysterious erections built of huge blocks of stone, sometimes burial chambers dug underground or covered by earthen mounds, sometimes apparently monuments standing in the open air above a grave. The origin of these has been plausibly traced, by way of Crete, to the forerunners of the Egyptian pyramids. Their relation to similar structures in such remote regions as southern India and the Caucasus is not clear, but it can scarcely be doubted that this

*Megalithic* ('Big Stone') culture spread northward up the Atlantic coast to Brittany, the British Isles and Denmark. The meaning and purpose of great stone circles like Avebury and Stonehenge has been much disputed: there is no conclusive evidence for the tempting theory that they were temples of sun-worship, or that their builders were prospectors engaged in exploiting the mineral wealth of these western lands. The small dark men of Mediterranean or 'Iberian' type common in Ireland and Wales may be partly descended from Megalithic colonists. Their scarcity in the East of Britain may be due to the absence of mineral wealth or to collision with other immigrants—not only historical invaders (Kelts, Saxons, Danes) but also prehistoric pioneers of a second stream of culture which had travelled likewise from the East but by a more overland route.

At an early date (before 3000 B.C.) a knowledge of 'food-production' with some of its associated arts had penetrated to the grasslands of the lower Danube valley. Thence it had worked its way westward among a population of lake-dwellers and riverside fishermen. Moving gradually onwards as the virgin soil became exhausted, these primitive *voortrekkers* eventually pushed their way to the North Sea and across to eastern Britain. With the increasing importance of metal, this route up the Danube valley became a trade-route for the copper and tin of Bohemia and even the magical amber of the Baltic. At the eastern end of the route (a precursor of the Berlin-Baghdad railway) were enterprising Mesopotamian merchants, like those who invoked Sargon's imperialist intervention in Asia Minor. Before 2000 B.C. a busy emporium had sprung up on the site of the later Troy—the key position on the most convenient land route from Asia to Europe and incidentally the sea route from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

### *The Spread of the Aryans*

And where, in all this, do the Aryans come in? They have been plausibly identified by some archaeologists with a people inhabiting the Ukrainian steppes, known as the 'Ochre Grave' people, because they had preserved a burial custom dating from the Reindeer Age. How far the various branches of Aryans may have spread at the time of our survey, there is no means of knowing: there is nothing about a pot or a dagger or a brooch to show whether its maker was an 'Aryan'. But we may guess that the Indo-Iranians had spread as far east as Turkestan, the Greeks south perhaps to Thessaly, the speakers of 'Italo-Keltic' dialects west to the neighbourhood of the Alps. The process of racial intermixture was doubtless already far advanced, and of course there is no reason to suppose that the Aryans were ever a 'pure' race, though presumably they were of a generally Europoid type.

How are we to account for the amazing spread and survival of the Aryan dialects? Scarcely by the superior civilization of their speakers: in India, Iran, Greece, Spain, even Britain, they encountered, partly destroyed and gradually adopted (with some modification) a civilization far higher than their own, but it was a modified form of Aryan speech that survived. No doubt the Aryans usually arrived as conquerors—it is even conceivable that there was at one time a wide and loose-knit 'Aryan' empire, comparable to the short-lived empires of other half-civilized nomads (Huns, Mongols, Arabs) and based on a monopoly of horse-power. The conquerors can seldom have been more than a minority. But their speech had one great advantage, common to Arabic, Turkish and other originally nomad languages that have shown a comparable vitality; it was intelligible over a wide area, whereas the pre-Aryan peoples were probably divided into more or less isolated communities speaking a great variety of local dialects. This is certainly true of the present-day Basques, the peoples of the Caucasus and the Indian hill tribes—the only pre-Aryan survivals in the Aryan territory of the Old World. Moreover, Aryan speech was expressive and perhaps relatively simple in pronunciation and structure. The average schoolboy is seldom struck by the

simplicity of Latin grammar, and primitive Aryan was certainly more complex and less regular than Latin. Latin has a declension of six cases; primitive Aryan may have had seven or eight; but the non-Aryan Avar dialect of the Caucasus has 30. To Latin's 18 consonants, Avar has 43. And as for Basque, it is said (on inadequate evidence) that the Basques are the most innocent of all peoples because even the Devil has never succeeded in learning their language. It is at least certain that the influence of Aryan speech, with its associated habits of thought, has been world-wide and incalculable. It is also probable that the Aryans brought into the older civilizations a more direct vision of life, less distorted by superstition, and a freer social organization. On the other hand, when left to themselves, they have not been conspicuously creative: the most primitive, and presumably the purest, Aryan language spoken today is Lithuanian, and it cannot be said that the Lithuanians have yet made a very big splash in the pool of history.

### *The Long Halt*

This brief survey of the world in the 20th Century B.C., if it has not entirely failed to do justice to its subject, has conjured up a vision full of hope. The stage seems set for an era of rapid and world-wide progress towards a higher civilization in which the orderly social and commercial life of the Sumerians might blend with the reflective imagination of Egypt, the material comfort of the Indus cities, the clear eye and steady hand of China, the untrammelled art of Crete and the surging, tumultuous vitality of barbarian Europe in the bright dawn of a happier world. But the truth is otherwise. At first there is no dawn at all, but darkness and confusion. Then, slowly and fitfully, as here and there the mists of antiquity roll back, there comes within our field of vision an ever widening panorama of toiling, squabbling humanity, struggling and straggling through the grey dawn of a stormy day.

In the 10th Century B.C., civilization was at a markedly lower ebb than in the 20th. The intervening millennium had given birth to little that was new except the extensive use of the horse and of iron, and these had combined to enhance the destructiveness of war. At this date, only the kingdom of Israel catches the eye, basking in the transient splendour of material greatness but with little as yet to foreshadow the spiritual greatness of less prosperous days. But after this things begin to move. It was as though humanity, after sleeping off the effects of a heavy meal, nutritious but hard to assimilate and containing much waste matter and some active poison, was ready to resume its feed. If we choose to revisit the planet some four centuries later, we shall find evidence from China to Italy of a new ferment of ideas working a transformation in human society more fundamental than any increase in material resources. The new meal was less in bulk than the last, but far richer in the essential vitamins of the human spirit. The 6th Century B.C. was an age of creative thinkers—some are outstanding personalities—but individuals of genius always depend for inspiration and for recognition on a touch of genius in the whole community in which they live. Great men are the product of great ages, and this was surely the greatest age in the world's history.

This survey will deal first with the two great original civilizations of the Far East—not sticking too closely to the limits of date. For here it must be 'Hail and farewell!' Thereafter we must narrow our vision to the direct ancestors of our European culture, from which (until quite recent times) the parallel developments of the human spirit in India and China have been almost wholly aloof.

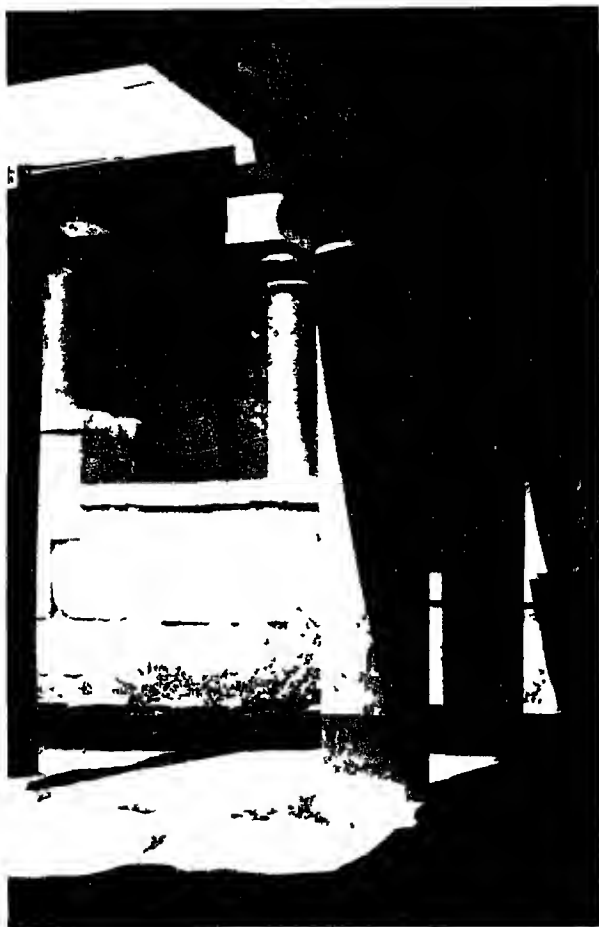


*After Problem*

LIKE THE RUINS OF SOME WORKING TOWN OF INCA-SHIRE

A street in Mohenjo-daro

VIII



STAIRWAY IN THE 'PALACE OF MINOS' AT  
KNOSSOS

## VIII

## A SECOND SURVEY OF THE WORLD (IN THE 6TH CENTURY B.C.): INDIA

*An Alien World*

ON the holy ground of Mother India angels fear to tread. Even mystical Germans are baffled by a mind that broods more darkly than their own in the cosmic night. Hindu writers, however perfect their command of English, remain the most incomprehensible of foreigners; it is as though they saw our familiar world thin and transparent against a metaphysical background that discolours our most cherished values, Pagan as well as Christian. And I suspect that the European expert on India sometimes feels, as the casual student certainly does all the time, that he may be missing the point altogether. He sees 400,000,000 human beings, mainly illiterate, superstitious, poverty-stricken peasants, living in mud-built villages, haunted by the demons of cholera and famine; vast plains, now withered with drought, now swimming under the monsoon rains and flooded as far as eye can reach, now devastated by the passage of a locust swarm or an unwieldy, undisciplined army, equally dreaded whether it be friend or foe; sculpture and architecture dominated by a grotesque and intricate symbolism, gods with three faces and a dozen arms, domes shaped out of all proportion like teacakes or pineapples and smothered under a crust of ornament; poems and sermons of interminable length, whose deadly monotony and repetitiveness of subject are relieved only by a perverse and far-fetched complexity of style, a fantastic camouflage of words to disguise the poverty of what a disgruntled reviewer recently described as 'that tremendous bore, the wisdom of the East'. And then the 'silent deep disdain' in the eyes of a propertyless fakir awakes a sudden misgiving that after all the East may be right; that the bustling West may be only chasing a dint in the ball, giving the pendulum an extra jerk that must be compensated on the backward swing; that history, like a tethered goat, can move only in circles—'a thousand years a city and a thousand years a forest'. To be fair to India, we must remember that her best minds have seldom been much interested in the things that interest us: they have seen this fleeting individual life as but one link in a chain that can be measured only in *mahāyugas* of 4,300,000 years, of which 1,000 make a *kalpa*. To Western science India can oppose the words of an ancient sage:

'In darkness dense they move who bow the knee to ignorance, but in still denser gloom those who rest satisfied with knowledge.'

And the council of village elders squatting under the pipal tree draws on an immemorial tradition that is likely to outlive the makeshift political expedients of the jerry-building West.

*The Vedic Age (1500–1000 B.C.?)*

Apart from the Indus Civilization, the earliest phase of Indian life known to us is that of the Aryan invaders when they were gradually increasing their dominions southwards and eastwards from the earliest settlements in the Punjab. This age is dimly reflected in a voluminous epic of later date (the *Mahābhārata*), which describes a great intertribal conflict perhaps roughly contemporary with the Trojan War. A truer picture is presented in the *Vedic* literature (Sanskrit *vēda* = knowledge; cf. Latin *video*, Greek [*w*] *idea*, English *wit*). The earliest collection (the *Rig-Vēda*) includes hymns composed perhaps as early as 1500 B.C. These were preserved in their primitive form by word of mouth; they were so sacred that they had to be memorized not only word for word but sound for sound. In

later days, when they came to be committed to writing, an elaborate and exact science of phonetics and grammar was evolved to safeguard them from change. When this first became known to European scholars at the beginning of last century, it introduced to the West a new and significant conception of the nature and growth of human speech.

The type of society implied by the Vedas is still Aryan rather than Indian or Oriental: it recalls the legendary 'heroic age' that precedes the written history of the Greek, Germanic and Celtic peoples. We see a mainly pastoral folk beginning to settle down into villages and till the soil. They are grouped in patriarchal families loosely organized into tribes with their own chiefs or kings: a race of lusty, beef-eating warriors, lovers of hunting, chariot-racing, cattle-raiding, minstrelsy, admirers of physical strength and courage with a strong sense of personal honour, quarrelsome and impatient, men of violent action rather than thought, conquerors rather than creators, though with some skill in such arts as metalwork (probably in bronze) and chariot-making. The women had the inferior status normal among pastoral peoples, but enjoyed a good deal of freedom, sometimes even in the choice of a husband, and were protected by a certain code of chivalry. Child marriages were not yet in vogue, and there is no mention of the faithful widow (*suttee* or *sati* = 'true woman') who perishes on her husband's funeral pyre. Wealth was reckoned chiefly in cattle. Class distinctions were not yet of primary importance, except that between the conquering Aryans and the conquered Dasyus, who formed a class of slaves or serfs. Even Aryans were sometimes reduced to slavery by the fortune of war or by debt, often due to the traditional Indian vice of gambling.

Men enjoyed this life and thought little of the hereafter, though they had the conception of an afterlife in the heaven of *Indra*, a sort of Happy Hunting Ground or Valhalla. *Indra*, god of the rainstorm, had taken precedence over the primitive Aryan sky-gods, *Dyāus* and *Varuna* (Greek *Zeus* and *Uranos*). The other deities, most of them more or less obvious personifications of natural forces such as *Agni* ('fire'; Latin *ignis*), included *Mitra* (worshipped by the Persians and later by the Romans as *Mithras*) and *Vishnu*, who had a great future in India. Goddesses play an insignificant part. The Vedas, composed and preserved by the priests, naturally reflect their interests and emphasize their authority, but they do not suggest that the priesthood yet constituted a race apart like the Brahman 'caste' of later times. They show only a vague foreshadowing of Brahman theology, and are mainly concerned with an increasingly elaborate ritual of prayer and sacrifice: the due preparation and offering of the sacred intoxicating *soma* juice, for instance, required the services of three skilled ministrants and some seven assistants.

The Vedic hymns are carefully constructed in metrical stanzas with considerable literary polish. Devoted mainly to the external formalities of religion, they lack human interest. Most pleasing to modern taste are the passages describing in the language of mythology the majestic aspects of nature under the stormy Indian sky. The following morsel from a hymn to Dawn (*Ushas*; Greek *Eos*; Latin *Aurora*; English *East*) shows the Indian vision already haunted by the illimitable perspective of the years:

Forth gleams the Giver of all Good, resplendent;  
Decked in bright raiment, Dawn flings wide the portals . . .  
To sight and movement, to command or service,  
Each to his lot in life hath she awakened. . . .

Gone are the mortals who beheld aforetime  
The dawns that were light up the frame of heaven;  
To us now living she unveils her splendour;  
Men yet unborn shall gaze on her hereafter.



*Rise of Brahmanism; Caste and Karma (c. 1000–500 B.C.?)*

So the dawn breaks on an India that seems to have little in common with the peaceable urban society of the vanished Indus Civilization. In the nature of things the Vedic Age was bound to end before long. Men cannot go on for ever raiding and conquering. Sooner or later the raiders must settle down; conquerors and conquered must arrive at some way of living together; the persistent forces of climate and soil will take a hand in the vast co-operative labour of building up a new civilization. European scholars have generally treated the Vedic literature as revealing the barbarous beginnings of *Hinduism*—a term that may be used to denote a social order and a philosophy of life as well as the strictly religious doctrines of *Brahmanism*. The Hindus themselves have always had a much loftier opinion of Vedic culture; and in the light of modern discoveries one of them can write:

'Even the so-called pre-Vedic civilization of the Indus valley . . . does not exhibit any alien or different type of culture or religion, but only earlier expressions of the thought-life of the Aryans which in later days got developed, sublimated and crystallized in the form of Vedic civilization.' (S. Sharvananda in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, I, p. 7.)

It seems most probable, however, that the Aryan culture of the Vedas was neither the first step nor a step forward in the direct line of Indian development, but an interruption from without. On this view, the earliest hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, like the earliest Hebrew scriptures, reveal the relatively simple religious ideas of a pastoral people on the outskirts of a higher civilization. The *Brāhmanas* and other priestly writings of the ensuing centuries interpret these in the light of a very different world-outlook that must have grown up among more settled communities. It may be that the peculiar features of Hinduism that gradually emerge in this literature had actually taken shape long before; as the Aryan conquerors (like many later invaders) became assimilated to the conquered, they would naturally tend to adopt, with some modification, a habit of life and thought which it seems most unlikely that they could so speedily have invented.

We have already seen in Ancient Egypt how food-gathering totemic tribes may retain their social and religious distinctions long after they have been amalgamated in a single civilized state. We have also noticed the tendency for the specialized occupations that emerge in the early phases of civilization to harden into hereditary classes. In Mesopotamia, besides the professional classes recognized by the Hammurabi code, certain occupations were organized (at least in Assyria) into something resembling the craft guilds of Mediaeval Europe. In India, to judge by the remnants of aboriginal hill-folk, clear-cut tribal groups without intermarriage date from primitive times; and it may be assumed that professional classes were already sharply defined in the pre-Aryan civilization. These internal divisions were later strengthened by the colour prejudice of the relatively fair-skinned invaders and probably also by the determination of the older elements in the population to preserve their own identity. Eventually the formation of a new social unit, with its own rights and obligations, became the customary solution of every problem, racial, economic or religious, till Indian society was broken into literally thousands of the watertight compartments known as *castes* (Portuguese *casta*, 'lineage'), not to speak of innumerable sub-castes. Even in communities converted from Brahmanism to the equalitarian teaching of Islam the caste distinctions persist; and they are putting up a good fight against the disruptive forces of the 20th Century.

In so far as practical difficulties permit, each caste is a separate community, with its own food taboos (which prevent members of different castes from feeding

together), its own modes of worship, its own standard of behaviour (*dharma*), and even its own self-governing institutions. The individual who disregards his caste regulations so blatantly as to become an *outcaste* brings lasting degradation on himself and all his descendants; but so long as he remains dutifully within the caste, with its provisions for mutual aid, he enjoys a social security rare in any other society. If he is a craftsman, he will be discouraged from making any innovations in his craft; but by following the rules of his caste he is unlikely to become a bad craftsman. Within the caste system it is extremely difficult to rise or to fall—to do much better or much worse than a certain prescribed standard. The system confers many privileges on particular classes, especially the priestly or *Brāhman* class who form the highest caste. But, as the poor man in any society clings to such wealth as he possesses, so even the depressed classes in India cling to their caste as a safeguard against further degradation.

This system of watertight compartments has its counterpart in the spiritual life of India. The Hindu religion has compartments in the cellarage inhabited by the bogeys of primitive magic; in its upper chambers it houses the intensest religious fervour and the subtlest metaphysical speculation of which the human spirit has yet shown itself capable. In particular, the theoretical basis of the caste system is itself a characteristic blend of magic, myth and metaphysics.

At the magical level of thought, the peculiar quality of each caste is conceived as a *mana* or physical purity, which is defiled by contact with an inferior caste. The 'Untouchables' at the bottom of the scale defile by mere proximity or the falling of their shadow. Late in the Vedic Age this crude conception (which is strongest in the least Aryan parts of India) was linked by an appropriate creation myth to Brahman theology:

The *Brāhman* was his [the Creator's] mouth;  
The *Rājanya* was made his arms;  
The being [called] the *Vaiçya*, he was his thighs;  
The *Çūdra* sprang from his feet.

(Quoted in *The Legacy of India*, p. 131, from the  
*Vedic Lay of Primordial Man*.)

The heading *Çūdra* covered the bulk of the indigenous population of serfs and labourers, perhaps already divided by unwritten custom into tribal and occupational castes. The *Vaiçyas* (from *viç*, 'people'; cf. Latin *vicus*, 'village'; Greek [*woikos*, 'dwelling']) were a middle class of yeomen and merchants, probably of mixed race. The warrior class of *Rājanyas* ('royal men') or *Kshatriyas* and the priestly *Brāhman* caste represented the Aryan conquerors. The struggle between the last two for precedence, a phase of the world-wide rivalry of 'spear chief' and 'cattle chief',<sup>1</sup> church and state, had already been decided in Brahmanic theory in favour of the 'mouth' as against the 'arms'. The myth illustrates not only the social precedence of the castes and their distinct functions but the belief that they were separately created species. Hindu law strove with ever-growing emphasis to prevent the sin of cross-breeding.<sup>2</sup> But there can be little doubt that large sections of the present-day Brahman caste are in fact descended from magicians or priests of the indigenous tribes, and probably there was from the beginning a large non-Aryan element in their heredity as well as their thought. Down to this day, for certain magical rites, Hindus have had recourse to the mysterious powers attributed to the witch-doctors of primitive tribes or to some otherwise despised caste: no one but a native could be expected to know the requisite procedure for propitiating the local gods.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Laws of Manu* (x, 58) a man of impure origin, though he may be noble (*ārya*) in appearance, is revealed by the ignobility, selfishness, savagery and laziness of his character.

On the philosophical plane, caste was justified by the characteristic Hindu doctrine of transmigration—the belief that the individual soul is born again after death in another body. The germ of this idea is widespread among primitive peoples, including some of the Indian hill tribes. In Brahmanical literature rebirth appears as a purgatory on the way to Indra's heaven, incurred as a penalty for the neglect of religious rites.

'They who know and perform this [the ritual of the Fire Sacrifice], having died, are born again; thus being born again, they are born again to immortality. They who do not know or do not perform this are born again after death and become the food of death again and again.' (*Ātapatha* [Hundred Path] *Brāhmaṇa*, x, 4, 3.)

Later it seems that Heaven itself has become only a passing phase in the cycle of existence—the 'wheel of things' on which all living beings are bound. This cycle of births and deaths is regulated by the law of *karma* (literally 'action' but commonly used to include 'the fruits of action'); every act that we do, whether good or bad, bears its fruits, and sooner or later its effects will recoil upon ourselves. Thus the apparent injustice of the caste system is really perfect justice. If we have earned ourselves a disagreeable lot in this incarnation, the remedy is not to seek social betterment (which would only make things worse) but to fulfil the law (*dharma*) of our station and earn a future reward.

'They who have lived a good life in this world will as a reward attain a good rebirth as a *Brāhmaṇ* or a *Kṣatriya* or a *Vaiśya*; but they who in this world have lived a shameful life will attain a shameful rebirth as a dog or a pig or an outcaste.' (*Chhāndogya Upanishad*, v, 10 (7).)

It is natural to suppose that this doctrine was invented by the Brahmins in their own interest. But it is not to be explained simply in terms of deliberate deception for the sake of material advantage. Rather, by a sort of social *karma*, the psychological effect of an inequitable system was recoiling on its chief beneficiaries. Finding no outlet for their energies in efforts to improve their own lot in life or that of their fellows, the most active minds were driven in on themselves. Many devoted their whole lives to pure introspection or contemplation. By developing a technique for the discipline or 'yoking' (*yoga*) of the senses to an inward focus in that state of trance or ecstasy which mystics describe as 'enlightenment' and sceptics as 'self-hypnotism', they were certainly actualizing new powers and possibly making discoveries of permanent value to humanity. Incidentally, their mystic visions frequently took the form of 'recollections' of former existences—an experience still common in India. But they paid for this diversion of interest by a disgust with normal human activities and an impulse towards mortification of the flesh. So far from enjoying their potential economic privileges, the Brahmins laid it down that one of their order who did not shun worldly honour and devote himself to austerity and holy meditation was no better than a *Čūdra*. And their meditation led them to the conclusion that (as one of them expresses it) 'to the man of discernment everything is misery'.

Doubtless this pessimism was primarily a luxury of the leisured. It can scarcely have been the working philosophy of the masses, even under the stress of arbitrary government, an oppressive climate and chronic malnutrition. But it cast its shadow over the whole of Indian life. There were indeed a few avowed *Nāstikas*—men who greeted the nightmare of perpetual rebirth with the blunt words *na asti*, 'it is not'. The teaching attributed to one of them, Ajita, is pure materialism.

'There is no such thing as alms or sacrifice or offering. There is neither fruit nor result of good and evil deeds. There is no such thing as this world or the next. . . . There are in the world no recluses or Brahmans . . . who, having realized by themselves alone both this world and the next, make their wisdom known to others. A human being is built up of the four elements. When he dies, the earthy in him returns and relapses to the earth, the fluid to the water, the heat to the fire, the windy to the air, and his faculties pass into space. . . . Fools and wise alike, on the dissolution of the body, are cut off, annihilated, and after death they are not.' (*Digha Nikāya*, i, 55, etc.)

Though Ajita was apparently an ascetic, some *Nāstikas* drew the logical inference from this Epicurean view of life: 'As long as we live, we ought to live happily, enjoying the pleasures of the senses.' In the main, however, all classes accepted without question the orthodox view, which was shared even by those sects that flouted the sanctity of the *Vedas* and the authority of the Brahmans so openly that they ranked as heretical. The goal of life was not prosperity or power or glory or knowledge, in our sense of these words, but deliverance—release from anguished individuality into 'the Infinite, which alone is bliss'.

Hinduism recognizes three roads to this deliverance: action (*karma*), knowledge and worship. Priestly writings often imply (as in Egypt) that the only sort of 'action' required is the due performance of sacrifice and prayer. But we also find an increasing emphasis on moral conduct, not as promoting the happiness of others but as a means of purifying the soul of the doer from the desires by which it is bound to the wheel of life. The point is well put by a modern Hindu writer:

'At every period of history there have been thousands of men and women who have been struggling to smooth the passage of life of others. And they have never succeeded. . . . We cannot add happiness to this world; similarly, we cannot add pain. The sum total of the energies displayed will be the same throughout. . . . There are only two ways [to freedom]; one is to give up the machine, to let go and stand aside. Give up our desires. . . . The other way is to plunge into the world and learn the secret of work. . . . Through work we shall come out. Through that machinery is the way out.' (Swami Vivekananda: *Vedānta Philosophy: Karma Yoga*.)

The author illustrates his argument with a fable in which a hermit refuses the hand of a princess and a family of small birds perish in the flames out of a mistaken notion that their charred remains will provide food for a guest; the moral is that either a recluse or a householder may practise self-sacrifice, and it does not detract from their merit that both sacrifices are utterly useless. In Kipling's tale of Sir Purun Das, the enlightened prime minister who retires from office to wander the world with a loin-cloth and begging-bowl until 'the red mist of doing has thinned to a cloud', the climax is reached when the sage rescues a village from an avalanche; to a Hindu reader this grossly utilitarian conclusion must spoil the moral of the story.

The way of knowledge, in the sense of mystical illumination, is even harder for the ordinary man than the way of Action. But an easier alternative is provided by Worship or Faith, aided by a legion of gods and goddesses, most of them peculiar to certain localities or castes—the tribal deities of an earlier day. At the head stands the great trinity, *Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the Preserver and *Shiva* the Destroyer, who typify the three levels or sources of Hindu religion. The pre-Aryan Shiva, the god of wild nature in its harsher aspects, is associated with fertility cults, some of them crude and barbarous. His wife, the terrible *Kali*, was honoured by the sect of *Thugs* with sacrifices of the lives of travellers.

The Aryan sun god Vishnu represents a lofty conception of a personal deity, invoked as a redeemer from the mechanical working of *karma*. The Bible of Vishnuism is the 'Lord's Song' (*Bhagavad-Gītā*), probably dating from about the beginning of the Christian era; some Europeans have maintained that it shows traces of Christian influence, but it expresses a faith that was already deeply rooted in Indian soil. In form it is a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna, who has doubts whether he can justify his warlike profession, and his charioteer Krishna, who speaks with authority as an incarnation (*avatāra*, literally 'descent') of Vishnu:<sup>1</sup>

'That which pervades this universe is imperishable; there is nothing can make it perish that changeless being. . . . Therefore fight. . . . He who deems This to be a slayer and he who thinks This to be slain are alike without discernment; This slays not, neither is it slain. This never is born and never dies, nor may it after being come again to be not; this unborn, everlasting, abiding Ancient is not slain when the body is slain. . . . Therefore thou dost not well to sorrow for any born beings. Looking likewise on thine own Law, thou shouldst not be dismayed; for to a knight there is no thing more blest than a lawful strife. . . . But if thou wilt not wage this lawful battle, then wilt thou fail thine own Law and thine honour, and get sin. . . . Do thine ordained work; for work is more excellent than no-work. . . .

'Many births of Me and thee have passed, O Arjuna. I know them all; but thou knowest them not. . . . For whensoever the Law fails and lawlessness uprises, then do I bring myself to bodied birth. To guard the righteous, to destroy evildoers, to establish the Law, I come into birth age after age. He who knows in verity My divine birth and [My] works comes not again to birth when he has left the body; He comes to Me. . . . They that make offering to gods go to gods; worshippers of Me come to Me. . . . On Me then set thy mind, in Me let thine understanding dwell; so shalt thou assuredly abide afterward in Me. If so thou canst not set thy mind on Me in steadfastness, then with rule of constant labour [a form of *yoga*] seek to win to Me. If thou hast not strength even for constant labour, give thyself over to Works for Me; if thou doest even Works for My sake, thou shalt win to adeptship. If likewise thou hast not strength to do this, then come thou unto My Rule and with restrained spirit surrender the fruit of all Works. For knowledge has more happiness than constant labour; [holy] meditation is more excellent than knowledge, surrender of fruits of works is better than [or 'springs from'] meditation; after surrender, peace comes straightway.' (ii, 17-20, 30-33; iii, 8; iv, 5-9; vii, 23; xii, 8-12.)

Brahma, the third member of the trinity, is too shadowy a figure to play much part in popular worship. To the philosopher, *Brahmā* (masculine) is a personification of *Brahmā* (neuter), the impersonal world-soul, the one absolute undefinable reality, 'the seer unseen, the hearer unheard, the thinker unthought, the knower unknown'. All the universe of worlds and men and gods is but a phantasm in the dreaming mind of Brahma. The inmost secret of the 'knowledge' that leads to deliverance is autotheism—the discovery that Brahma, the infinite soul, is identical with the soul or self (*ātma*) of each one of us; you and I are not only part of the dream, we are part of the dreamer—we are Brahma.

#### *Anti-Brahmanism: Jains and Buddhists (6th-5th Century B.C.)*

From these metaphysical heights let us return to the illusory world of space and time which is the humble province of the historian. By the 6th Century B.C.

<sup>1</sup> The *Gītā* is now incorporated in the *Mahābhārata*. Some believe that it embodies the teaching of a historical Krishna, who may have lived as early as 600 B.C. Orthodox Hindus regard it as much older than this. The following extracts are taken from the version of L. D. Barnett.

a society dominated by the teaching of the Brahmins was well established, at any rate in the 'Middle Country' east of the Indus valley, between the Ganges and the Jumna. It was doubtless richer in material resources than Vedic society and far more stable. But it was politically weak, since caste loyalty checked the growth of a strong national spirit.

Further east there existed a number of pioneer states in which the warrior class had not yet acknowledged the supremacy of the priesthood. Some of these were aristocratic republics, such as that of the Sākya of Nepal, ruled by noble families whose members met in a council chamber to decide the affairs of state. There was no system of majority rule—decisions were expected to be unanimous, as in an English jury—so that these meetings must often have been as turbulent as those of the Polish Diet, in which any individual could veto a proposal. A similar constitution functioned till recently in the island of Samoa, and sufficed somehow for the affairs of a simple community.

Other states were kingdoms, of various size and importance. The most famous was Magadha, lying round the site of the modern Patna on the Ganges. Bimbisāra king of Magadha (c. 540–490 B.C.?) was a great patron of religious teachers. One of the greatest of these is said to have been a relative of the king himself—he was conceived by some oversight in the womb of a Brahman woman, but the gods hastened to rectify this and ensure that, like all great saints, he should be born of the Kshatriya caste (saints of humble origin are as scarce in India as in Mediaeval Christendom). This was Mahāvira, surnamed 'The Conqueror' (*Jina*), whence his followers are styled Jains. His conquest was over no earthly foe, but over the devices and desires of his own heart. He preached deliverance from the 'wheel of things' by self-denial and the most extraordinary mortification of the flesh. The record of his enlightenment in the Jain Scriptures shows that Indian tradition does not always suffer from vagueness:

'During the thirteenth year of meditation, in the second month of summer, in the fourth fortnight . . . on its tenth day . . . while the moon was in conjunction with the asterism Uttara-Phalgunī, when the shadow had turned towards the east, and the first wake was over, outside the town Jrimbhikagrāma, on the northern bank of the river Rijupālikā, in the field of the householder Sāmāga, in a north-eastern direction from an old temple, not far from a Sāl tree, in a squatting position with joined heels exposing himself to the heat of the sun, with the knees high and the head low, in deep meditation, in the midst of abstract meditation, he reached *nirvāna*, the complete and full, the unobstructed, unimpeded, infinite and supreme, best knowledge and intuition. . . . He became omniscient and comprehending all objects, he knew all conditions of the world, of gods, men, and demons; whence they come, where they go, whether they are born as men or animals, or become gods or hell-beings; their food, drink, doings, desires, and the thoughts of their minds; he saw and knew all conditions in the whole world of living beings.'<sup>1</sup>

His followers do not regard Mahāvira as the originator of their faith (we never get back to the origin of anything in India), but as the twenty-fourth of a series of prophets. The Jains have never been very numerous, but (in spite of their rejection of orthodox Brahmanism) they have persisted as a select community, holding abstruse metaphysical dogmas and practising in their monasteries an austere morality, designed to destroy the effects of old *karma* and prevent the inflow of new.

On one occasion Bimbisāra, looking from his palace, beheld a youthful

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Cambridge History of India* I, p. 159.

stranger 'fair, tall and pure', seeking his food from house to house with the begging-bowl that is the traditional badge of India's holy men. Being brought before the king and questioned by him, he spoke thus:<sup>1</sup>

'A country is there, O king, close to a slope of the Himālayas, endowed with wealth and valour. Its people . . . are of the race of the sun, and Sākyas are they by birth; from that family have I gone forth, O king, having no longing for lusts. Seeing the wretchedness of lusts, and looking on renunciation as peace, I shall go to the struggle; therein my mind is glad.'

His name was Siddhārtha Gautama; he is said to have referred to himself as 'The Attainer' (*Tathāgata*), but he is best known by the title of 'The Awakened' or 'Enlightened' (*Buddha*). Many tales have been woven by pious fancy round his quest for salvation; the most familiar to English readers are those enshrined in the glowing verse of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. A few facts seem well established. He sought deliverance first after the fashion of the Jains, but found it not:

'Then I thought, those ascetics and Brahmins in the past, who have suffered sudden, sharp, keen, severe pains, at the most have not suffered more than this. . . . But by this severe mortification I do not attain superhuman truly noble knowledge and insight. Perhaps there is another way to enlightenment.'

Then at last, in a trance under the Tree of Enlightenment (*Bodhi*), revelation dawned upon him. An ancient poem (translated in *The Light of Asia*) professes to give the words in which he first expressed his experience:

Many a house of life  
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought  
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;  
Sore was my ceaseless strife!

But now,  
Thou builder of the tabernacle—thou!  
I know thee! Never shalt thou build again  
These walls of pain,  
Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits, nor lay  
Fresh rafters on the clay;  
Broken thy house is, and the ridge-pole split!  
Delusion fashioned it!  
Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain.

It is difficult to say just what was new in the Buddha's teaching. Much of it was the commonplace of Hindu philosophy, but presented with a new emphasis and a practical bearing. He accepted the doctrine of *karma*, but refused to admit the imperishable Self of the autotheists as an ultimate reality. He acknowledged the existence of the traditional gods, but attached little importance to them. The nearest approach to a Supreme Being in his system is *dharma*, which appears to include both natural and moral law; it also denotes life regulated in accordance with such law. He allowed to good works, moderate asceticism and worship of the gods a certain relative value, but deemed them ineffectual in themselves as means to 'release', which he described as 'blowing out' (*nirvāṇa*):

As the extinction of a flame  
Even so is the mind's release.

<sup>1</sup> The following passages dealing with the Buddha are taken from E. J. Thomas: *Early Buddhist Scriptures*. This is a selection from those rules and discourses, mostly preserved in the Pali Canon of Ceylon, that have the best claim to reproduce the 'Buddha Word'. Even these, however, are not known to have assumed their present form till some centuries after his death.

This did not exclude the possibility that some 'new light gleams beyond our broken lamps'. But *nirvāna* could not be described, since 'when all qualities are removed, all forms of speech are removed also'. This was one of the four meta-physical questions on which the Buddha refused to dogmatize. Is the universe eternal? Is it infinite? Is the principle of life merely the body? Does the *tathāgata*, the being who has attained release, continue to exist? When posed with such questions as these, he would answer:

'There is much that I have realized and have not declared to you; and but little have I declared. And why, monks, have I not declared it? Because it is not profitable, does not belong to the beginning of the religious life, and does not tend to revulsion, absence of passion, cessation, calm, higher knowledge, enlightenment. Therefore have I not declared it.'

He deprecates the use of *yoga* as a means to the attainment of psychic powers (passing through walls or mountains, soaring aloft, stroking the sun or entering the world of Brahma), but rightly employed it forms an important part of his system. Like St. Francis of Assisi, with whom he has much in common, he is remarkable less as an original thinker than as the founder of a religious order which gave concrete expression to his conception of the good life—a life devoted to *dharma* and the quest for release. His followers were to abandon the ties of hearth and home and to live as hermits or monks, putting their faith in the Founder, refraining from the killing of living things, the taking of what is not given, false, slanderous, harsh or frivolous speech, and every kind of violence and sensual indulgence, directing all their thoughts to the destruction of the 'tendencies' towards rebirth—those selfish desires and limitations that cause the painfulness of existence. Finally the disciple

'With his mind thus concentrated, purified and cleansed, without lust, free from the depravities, subtle, ready to act, firm and impassible, turns and directs his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the tendencies. He duly understands "this is pain", "this is the cause of pain", "this is the cessation of pain", "this is the path that leads to the cessation of pain". . . . Thus his mind is released from the tendency of sensual desire, from the tendency of desire for existence, from the tendency of ignorance. In the released is the knowledge of his release: ignorance is destroyed, the religious life has been led, done is what was to be done, there is nothing further for this world.'

The noble (*ārya*) Eightfold Way to Salvation was open to all men without distinction of caste. Even women were admitted, but the Buddha expected trouble from his nuns: he prophesied that because of their admission to the houseless life the 'good doctrine', which would else have lasted 1,000 years, would last only 500. Laymen who chose to remain in the world would be bound by the old rules of caste and the other customary laws of church and state (the Buddha did not aim directly at social reform); but they could give alms to disciples and receive in return 'discourses about almsgiving, morality, heaven, the evils of lusts, the worthlessness of the defilements and the blessing of renunciation', which would help them to be reborn in a favourable station and prepare their minds for entering fully on the Way in some future life.

Buddhist teaching lays great stress on free will and self-reliance. Every man must work out his own salvation. But, if 'no one helps us but ourselves', it follows that we can help none but ourselves. There is a danger that the doctrine of utter selflessness may end in utter selfishness. From this fate early Buddhism



was saved by the personality and example of the Founder. There can be no doubt that his life's work was inspired by a passionate desire (which he ought logically to have repudiated as a 'tendency towards rebirth') to bring relief to suffering humanity, and he bade his disciples:

'Being released from all ties human and divine, go journeying for the profit of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, profit and happiness of gods and men.'

But the charge of selfishness has sometimes been brought against those Ceylonese and Burmese monks who have continued to follow the Eightfold Way towards *nirvāṇa* in conformity with the letter, if not always the spirit, of the Master's teaching. By most later Buddhists this is now disdained as a 'Low Career' (*Hinayāna*, generally translated 'Lesser Vehicle'); their ideal is to follow the Great Career (*Mahāyāna*) of the *bodhisattva*, or candidate for Buddhahood, who aims not directly at the attainment of release for (or from) himself but at sharing with his fellow Buddhas the task of redeeming mankind. So there develops a new religion in which the human figure of the 'Recluse of the Sākya' (*Sākya-muni*) becomes a disembodied divinity—a redeemer god like Vishnu—and his cult, banished from its native soil, grows in ritual complexity as it spreads to China, Tibet and Japan.

#### *The Maurya Empire (4th–3rd Century B.C.)*

This is anticipating. But, to see Buddhism exemplified in practice and to form a rather less nebulous picture of Indian civilization, we must look at least a century or two beyond the date of our survey. About 490 B.C. king Bimbisāra was murdered by one of his sons, who succeeded him and embarked on a career of conquest. The Buddhist Canon retails a very pertinent question that this worldling is supposed to have put to the Buddha, which incidentally illustrates the complexity of Indian society at this date:

'Now, just as, Lord, there are these many kinds of crafts, such as elephant-drivers, horse-drivers, charioteers, archers, standard-bearers, camp-officers, camp-caterers, lofty nobles, kings' sons, princes, military scouts, heroes, soldiers in leather, slaves' sons, cooks, barbers, bath-attendants, scullions, garland-makers, washermen, weavers, basket-makers, potters, calculators, accountants, or any other of the many crafts like these, they in this actual life enjoy the visible fruit of their craft; by means of it they make themselves happy and prosperous, they make their parents, their wives and children, their friends and companions, happy and prosperous; and they establish for ascetics and Brahmans the highest kind of sacrifices, which are worthy of heaven, produce happiness and tend to heaven. Now, Lord, is it possible to show in this actual life a visible fruit of the life of an ascetic?'

In the story, the king is so charmed by the Master's picture of the life of the disciple, who, 'endowed with faith in the *Tathāgata*, gives up his wealth and his kin, shaves off his hair and beard, puts on yellow robes and goes forth to a houseless life', that he becomes a convert on the spot.

Then for more than a century even such semi-historical sources are lacking. Late in the 4th Century B.C., according to a drama which must be founded on fact, there occurred a rebellion against the reigning king of Magadha, led by the commander of the army, Chandragupta Maurya, and a Brahman priest Kautilya. The rebellion failed and its leaders sought refuge in exile towards the north-west, the region of the Indus valley.

' Since the 6th Century a part at least of the Indus region had been included

in the empire of the Great Kings of Persia, who ruled (as stated in the *Book of Esther*) 'from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred seven and twenty provinces'. Of these provinces the Indian was much the wealthiest.

'The population of the Indians is by far the greatest of all the peoples that we know, and they pay [to the Great King] a yearly tribute proportionately greater than all the rest, namely 360 talents of gold dust.' (Herodotus, iii, 94.)

Herodotus, from whom this statement is quoted, was born in or about 483 B.C., the most generally accepted date of the Buddha's death. He also tells us that the army of the Persian king Xerxes, which marched to the conquest of Greece in 480 B.C., included Indians 'clad in garments of tree-wool [i.e. cotton] and carrying bows of cane and arrows tipped with iron' (vii, 65).

In the next century the tide had turned, and it was the Greeks and Macedonians who marched to the conquest of Persia under Alexander the Great. After marching right through the Persian Empire, his army penetrated the passes of the Hindu Kush (326 B.C.) and entered the Punjab, where he established a Greek colony. The great battle on the river Jhelum, in which the Macedonian cavalry routed the elephants of the heroic king Porus, is more fully recorded than any other episode in the early history of India. Alexander purposed to advance down the Ganges valley to the eastern ocean, but the weary soldiery refused to march further into the unknown, and the conqueror reluctantly turned westward to meet his fate at Babylon.

Plutarch relates that Alexander during his stay in India was seen by the native prince Sandrocottus, then in his youth. And here at last our two streams of tradition meet, for in Sandrocottus we recognize the exiled captain of Magadha, Chandragupta Maurya. Some years later Chandragupta returned to Magadha to try his fortune again, aided by new allies, including one Parvataka (who is possibly the same as Porus). This time he succeeded, and by a career of prowess and policy (not unaided by treachery) he 'overran all India with an army of 600,000 men'—or so Plutarch says. At any rate, this first Indian Empire must have included most of northern India.

His guiding genius Kautilya is remembered as a master of diplomacy, who 'churned the nectar of the science of polity from the ocean of the political sciences'. It is probable that some of his Machiavellian wisdom survives in the Manual of Policy (*Arthaśāstra*) ascribed to him, though in its present form this work may be some centuries later.<sup>1</sup> If it cannot be relied on as a portrait of the Maurya empire, or indeed of any actual state, it affords a unique glimpse of ancient Hindu civilization as seen by a thorough-going realist. While acknowledging that some occurrences are providential and unpredictable, 'Kautilya' has great faith in foresight and policy and a healthy contempt for fatalism. Though he may not be immune from the universal belief in magic and sorcery, he is full of devices by which these (or a pretence of them) can be used as instruments of policy. He shocked his countrymen not only by his advocacy of timely ruthlessness and treachery but by his devotion to 'the goddess of wealth, whom thousands of kings have rejected'. He praises wealth as the means to the two other good things of life, virtue (or charity) and enjoyment, and urges the king to 'endear himself to the people by bringing them into contact with wealth'. He has a clear conception of the qualities of enterprise and self-reliance needed to build up a wealthy country out of waste land ('as unproductive as a barren cow'); of the methods to be adopted (e.g. by colonizing it with men of the lowest caste, which is 'serviceable in many ways, plentiful and permanent'); and of the goal in view:

<sup>1</sup> The quotations are from the translation by R. Shamasastri [Mysore, 1923].

'Possessed of capital cities both in the centre and at the extremities of the kingdom; productive of subsistence not only to its own people but also to outsiders on occasions of calamities; repulsive to enemies; powerful enough to put down neighbouring kings; free from miry, rocky, uneven and desert tracts, as well as from conspirators, tigers, wild beasts and large tracts of wilderness; beautiful to look at; containing fertile lands, mines, timber forests and elephant forests and pasture grounds; artistic; containing hidden passages; full of cattle; not depending upon rain for water; possessed of land-ways and water-ways; rich in various kinds of commercial articles; capable of bearing the burden of a vast army and heavy taxation; inhabited by agriculturists of good and active character; full of intelligent masters and servants, and with a population noted for its loyalty and good character—these are the qualities of a good country.' (vi, 1.)

Behind the *Arihaṇṣṭra*'s ideal picture we see a country which must have had some real experience of strong and well organized government and material prosperity, though we also note references to famine, pestilence and brigandage. We see numerous highways, thronged with merchants and soldiers, royal couriers and mendicant fakirs, and enough vehicles to necessitate a regular highway code; but we may doubt whether the king always fulfilled his royal duty to keep them in repair and protect them from 'molestations of courtiers, workmen, robbers and boundary guards'. Although normal Indian opinion had a strong rural bias, holding that 'it is impossible for one to attain salvation who lives in a town covered with dust', we see here large fortified towns, some built in the new fashion of stone instead of wood. Trade and industry were evidently well developed. The craft guilds indulged in public dinners and other festivities. The misery of existence cannot have been perpetually present to those countryfolk who are frowned on by 'Kautilya' for quitting their tasks to attend dramatic and other entertainments in the village halls and wasting their hard-earned substance in providing 'plentiful liquid refreshment' and other commodities for 'actors, dancers, singers, drummers, buffoons and bards'.

Criminal justice ('clearing of thorns') provided work for innumerable magistrates, police spies and *agents provocateurs*, who had to deal with such modern offences as unlawful combination and boycott. The civil law recalls the Hammurabi code, notably in the rights it accords to slaves and the relatively high status of women as compared with later Hinduism, including freedom of divorce, remarriage of widows<sup>1</sup> and protection against officials in prisons and workshops. There is an unmistakably Indian touch in the law prohibiting men from becoming *çramanas* (houseless ascetics, no doubt including Buddhist monks) without making due provision for their dependants and from converting women to asceticism.

The main item in the national revenue was the land-tax (theoretically ranging from one sixth to one third of the produce), collected by a many-graded hierarchy of officials down to the village headman; Kautilya recommends that collectors should not be too squeamish, especially in squeezing the rich, and describes some useful 'frame-ups' and tricks based on faked magic. Other sources of revenue included 'benevolences', the profits of royal forests and mines, customs duties, fines in the law-courts, licences issued to craftsmen, traders and proprietors of casinos, and passports to travellers. The total had to meet a heavy expenditure on army and civil service, including even widows' and orphans' pensions, besides all kinds of public works. In practice this elaborate bureaucratic machinery, if it ever really existed outside the minds of theorists, must often have proved unwieldy. It could not have functioned perfectly unless the officials cheated exclusively in the interests of the state. Some of the offices appear to have been

<sup>1</sup> Though the *sati* is mentioned by Greek travellers as early as the Maurya Dynasty.

hereditary, and the labours and powers of the central government must have been lessened by viceroys and nobles ruling their estates in semi-independence. The aristocratic republics were not extinct, but in orthodox political theory the existence of an absolute monarch is taken for granted. It is important that he should be guided by the right principles in selecting his ministers (a controversial topic on which we are given the conflicting views of seven different authorities besides Kautilya himself). He should have had a fitting education in the Vedas, philosophy and public business, and is expected to devote his life to a strenuous round of duties, for ever seeking to frustrate the unashamedly knavish tricks of his rivals and hedged about by precautions against assassination.

Chandragupta's empire evidently owed much to the Persian Empire, which Alexander had taken over rather than destroyed. He maintained friendly relations with Alexander's successor Seleucus. An envoy of Seleucus, the Greek Megasthenes, paid several state visits to Chandragupta's court at Patna and left an account of his observations from which extensive quotations still survive. Like a true European, he finds the Indians' historical traditions untrustworthy and their natural science rather silly, and he notes that 'like Plato, they concoct fairy-tales about the indestructibility of the soul and judgements in Hades and the like . . . so far as seems conducive to piety'. But he esteems them 'better philosophers in practice than in theory', and is struck by the general orderliness, honesty and frugality. His sketch of the caste system, a tourist's impression rather than a scientific analysis, may be condensed as follows:<sup>1</sup>

'The population of India is divided into seven classes; it is not lawful to marry into another class or to change to another profession, except for the philosophers. These constitute the smallest and most honoured class, consisting of the Brahmins and the Çramanas. The Brahmins are much in demand before the birth of a child, reputedly for their luck-bringing charms but actually for the sensible advice they give to the mother. They live a simple life in groves outside the cities, exchanging edifying discourses. At 37 they marry, taking as many wives as possible. They do not impart their philosophy to them, fearing that, if they are frivolous, they may gossip about sacred mysteries to the profane; if they are earnest-minded, they may rise so superior to pleasure and pain that they will no longer be willing to submit to their husbands. The annual synod of the Brahmins advises the king on affairs of state. The various sects of Çramanas include the Wood-Dwellers, who live as celibates, eating wild fruits and clad in the bark of trees, and the Healers, students of humanity, who subsist on alms and cure the sick, mainly by dieting. Some of these [the Buddhists?] admit women to the philosophic life.

'The cultivators, the largest and most estimable class, are exempt from military and other public service. Often at the same time and place you may see troops lined up for battle and cultivators undisturbedly ploughing or digging. All the land is the king's, and they cultivate it for a rent at one fourth of the produce.

'The herdsmen and hunters lead a roving life in tents, receiving an allowance of grain from the king in return for killing noxious beasts and seed-stealing birds.

'Of the craftsmen and journeymen, some pay a tribute or perform public services; the armourers and shipbuilders are employees of the king.

'The soldiers live idly and convivially at the cost of the state, so that they are quickly available at need.

<sup>1</sup> From Strabo: *Geography*, book xvi.

'The spies keep an eye on what is going on and report it secretly to the king; they count on help from the prostitutes.

'The state officials comprise rural surveyors, who supervise roads and canals and the work of wood-cutters, miners and other country labourers; urban surveyors, who have the care of artisans and visiting strangers, register births and deaths, regulate trade and collect a tenth of its profits; and military commanders.'

Chandragupta appears to have been a typical sample of the able Oriental despot. A ruler of a very different stamp was his grandson Asoka (c. 274-237 B.C.), who is praised by Buddhist chroniclers as a zealous upholder of their faith. He is better known by the inscriptions on pillars and cliffs that he set up as way-side pulpits in various parts of his wide dominions. They reveal an earnest, kindly, tolerant man, a little priggish perhaps, but combining sense and sensibility and practical beneficence with a conception of the kingly function that has rarely been equalled. A few extracts<sup>1</sup> will speak for themselves:

'The country of Kalinga was conquered when the king, Beloved-of-the-gods, had been anointed eight years; 150,000 were led captive, 100,000 were killed and many times that number died. Since then Kalinga is full of the king's zealous protection of piety (*dharma*), longing for piety and teaching of piety; that is the king's penance for having conquered Kalinga. The slaughter, death and captivity of a people that accompany a conquest are distressing to the king; but still more distressing is it that among the sufferers are Brahmans, Çramanas and householders who practise obedience to elders, parents and teachers, seemly behaviour and steadfast devotion to friends, companions, kinsfolk, slaves and servants, and to these the personal violence, death or exile suffered by their loved ones also is as a personal suffering. And there is no country except that of the Yavanas [Greeks] where these holy men are not, and there is no place in any country where men have no faith in one sect or another. Today the king is grieved by even one thousandth part of the suffering that befell at Kalinga; and if any man does him wrong, he must bear all that can be borne. . . . The conquest he most desires is conquest through piety; and this he has achieved by his teaching and his envoys here and in neighbouring lands and as far as the realms of the Yavana kings Antiyoka [Antiochus II, grandson of Seleucus], Turamaya [Ptolemy II of Egypt] and Antekina [Antigonus II of Macedonia] and southward as far as Taprobané [Ceylon, where Asoka's missionaries established a Buddhist school that still flourishes]. Such a conquest is flavoured with love, but that in itself is a small thing. The king esteems as bearing great fruit only that which concerns the next world. And this edict has been recorded to this end, that my sons and grandsons, whoever they may be, in conquests by the arrow may be merciful and forbearing and value rather a conquest by piety. That is good for this world and the next. (*Rock Edict xiii.*)

'The king desires that all sects may dwell at all places, because they all seek self-restraint and purification of heart. (*Rock Edict vii.*)

'For a long time kings have been accustomed to go out on pleasure tours, with hunting and the like diversions. When he had been consecrated ten years, the king betook himself to the Place of Enlightenment [Bodhi Tree]. Since then he has gone on piety tours, with visits and gifts to the Brahmans and Çramanas, and the aged, and visits, instructions in piety

<sup>1</sup> Condensed from the version in D. R. Bhandarkar: *Asoka*.

and enquiries about piety of the provincials. And he has found great delight in this other sphere. (*Rock Edict viii.*)

'Great is my delight in the Buddha, his Law of Piety and his Fellowship of Monks and Nuns. Whatever has been said by the Blessed Buddha has been well said. (*Bhabru Inscription.*)

'Many people, especially women, perform trivial rites at times of sickness, marriage, childbirth and travel. But these bear little fruit. The rite that bears great fruit is the rite inspired by piety, namely seemly behaviour towards servants and slaves, reverence for teachers and kindness to animals. (*Rock Edict ix.*)

'In times past there were kings who wished that men might grow with the growth of piety. But men did not so grow. When I considered "How may men be brought to grow with a befitting growth of piety?" this occurred to me: I will make proclamations of piety and give instructions therein; men hearkening thereto will conform, uplift themselves and mightily grow with the growth of piety. Thus have I done, and I have set officers over many people to preach and disseminate it. On the roads I have planted banyan trees; they will offer shade to man and beast. I have grown mango-orchards. I have caused wells to be dug and resthouses and waiting-sheds to be made for the enjoyment of man and beast. This is indeed a trifle, because mankind has been blessed with many such blessings by earlier kings. But I have done this that men may practise piety.' (*Pillar Edict vii.*)

We have unfortunately little means of gauging the success of Asoka's efforts. We may well believe that his reign was a time of 'enjoyment for man and beast' and that the principles of Buddhism under his patronage won that hold over at least the upper classes in India which they were to keep for many centuries. But did the people really grow with the growth of piety? And was the king's pacifism one reason why the Maurya empire dissolved into a chaos of warring states?

The later history of India within the period of this volume can claim only a very rapid summary. The Greek settlers in the Punjab and Afghanistan, cut off from European civilization by the inroads of Parthians, Scythians and other barbarians from central Asia, maintained something of their culture for nearly three centuries under lines of kings whose virile, sensitive features are clearly impressed on the most attractive portrait coins ever minted. More than one seems to wear a faintly ironic smile, as though he guessed that his hopeless cause was doomed to speedy oblivion. One of them, Menander, who made himself master for a time of a great part of the Maurya dominions, figures in a Buddhist classic, the *Questions of Milinda*, as one unrivalled in all India for wisdom, strength and valour, a skilled disputant and a diligent seeker after truth—which it is claimed that he found in the teaching of the Buddha. The Greeks left their mark on Indian astronomy, and possibly on medicine and mathematics (though here the invention of the 'Arabic' numerals, and especially the symbol for zero, enabled the Indians, with their genius for abstract speculation, to outstrip the West). Greek influence on Indian philosophy and literature is disputable; certainly it cannot have been profound. The only real borrowing was in the field of popular stories and fables, and here India probably gave more than she got. A Greek sculptor may have been the first to represent the Buddha in human form, but the conventional figure of later times is the work of Indian artists inspired by a very different ideal. Three centuries of partial European rule left little enduring impress on a mode of life and thought which had already survived at least one conquest and was destined to survive many more.



THREE-HEADED SHIVA FROM ELEPHANTA



*Arthur Probsthain*  
THREE-FACED GOD (SHIVA?)  
FROM MOHENJO DARO



*Photograph by John Morris*

ASOKA PILLAR AT THE BUDDHA'S BIRTHPLACE



THE BUDDHA AS ASCETIC



## IX

## THE SECOND SURVEY CONTINUED: CHINA

*The Central Land and the Outside World*

EVERY student of the shilling shocker is familiar with that baleful figure 'the inscrutable Chinaman'. Certainly the Chinese gentleman, like his English counterpart, is trained to disguise his feelings, but most Europeans who have come into contact with the Chinese have been impressed by an almost childlike quality of open-heartedness. And, though the cult of mystification is not unknown in China, Chinese literature in the main (as an early admirer said of Confucius) 'opens men's eyes and ears and imparts a revelation derived from direct contemplation of nature'. While the typical Indian sage seems always to be looking *through* things into the immensity beyond, the typical Chinese sage strives to look *at* things with the eye of an artist and depict them precisely and baldly as they are. It is no chance that Hindu thought has found its chief European exponents in mystical Germany and Chinese thought in logical France. The best minds of China have generally directed their attention to practical problems of government and social relations, leaving the fields of religion and pure science to be filled by the figments of popular fancy. Their writings are realistic and moralistic, rich in concrete images, 'full of wise saws and modern instances', equally chary of abstract speculation and of romantic passion.

It might seem, then, that it would be no hard thing for China to meet Europe on the common ground of human reason and objective reality. And those rare minds on either side who have laboriously overstepped the gulf seem to have arrived at a deep mutual sympathy and understanding. But the gulf is a wide one.

Primarily it is due to the separate growth of civilization in East and West from the New Stone Age onwards. The Chinese conceived of civilization as originating in their own country, the Central Flowery Land, round whose outer rim dwelt only a few savage tribes of mountaineers or nomads; the very existence of other nations was long unsuspected and later deliberately ignored. It is barely a century since the reality of Foreign Devils was obtruded on the Chinese consciousness by the guns of the British Navy. The civilization of the Central Land has spread outwards in a wide circle extending from innermost Asia to the Isle of Dwarves which we call Japan, whose natives reproduced its outward graces as successfully as they have since copied the battleships and factories of Europe. A few elements of Chinese culture may even have crossed the Pacific to America before Columbus crossed the Atlantic. To the world at large, China has given silk and tea, printing, paper and paper money, the mariner's compass and gunpowder, the game of chess and the earliest rhymed verse. Many other inventions have been claimed with some warrant as Chinese, ranging from spectacles to spaghetti. But the influence of Chinese ideas on the spiritual life of the West appears to have been negligible. Conversely the nomads from the steppes who overran China more than once in its 4,000 years of history, while they partly arrested and partly stimulated the growth of the native civilization and transmitted certain inventions and ideas from the outside world, worked no fundamental change. The introduction of bronze into China from the West (before 2000 B.C.) was followed by the introduction of iron (c. 500 B.C.?), but Chinese metalwork has always had a character of its own. Indian mysticism may have coloured Chinese thought even before the days of the Buddha, and from c. 200 A.D. Buddhist worship, philosophy and art have exercised a profound influence on Chinese life. In the 7th Century China opened her doors to missionaries of other religions of the relatively Near East—Zoroastrians, Manichees, Nestorian Christians. But these

faiths left little permanent mark, and even Buddhism in China has become far more Chinese than Indian.

### *Speech and Writing*

In translating from one European language to another, we are aided not only by their common Aryan structure and the large common vocabulary (chiefly of Greek or Latin origin) but by the common stock of ideas developed in the Mediterranean cradle of our civilization: we are sure to find an equivalent for 'God', 'soul' or 'love' similarly charged with Christian associations, a word for 'idea' as used by Plato or 'history' in the sense conferred by Herodotus, for 'property' or 'liberty' as envisaged in the clear brains of Roman lawyers; and we shall need no footnote to explain allusions to 'the prodigal son' or 'the fall of Troy'. The intermediary between Europe and China can look for no such ready-made equivalents; he has no help but the basic similarity of human nature and human experience. It is a striking proof of that similarity that the painstaking scholars who have sought to interpret the Chinese classics to the West agree as closely as they do in their interpretations, though it must be admitted that the disagreements are sometimes considerable.

Their task is aggravated by the peculiarities of Chinese speech and writing. In English, which is an analytic language with a highly simplified grammar, a word like *smoke* may serve as a Common Noun, an Abstract Noun ('Just time for a short *smoke*'), a Transitive or Intransitive Verb or an Adjective ('a *smoke* screen'); but it retains certain inflected and derivative forms (*smokes*, *smoked*, *smoking*, *smoker*, *smoky*, *smokeless*, *unsmokable*). In the 'Isolating Languages' of south-eastern Asia (Chinese, Siamese, Tibetan, Burmese, etc.) there are no inflected or derivative words at all; every word consists of one syllable, unalterable in form and available for use as any part of speech. In a sense there are no parts of speech at all and no grammar, though there are certain 'empty words' (corresponding to our Prepositions, Auxiliaries or Particles). Phrases and sentences are constructed simply by putting the words together in a fixed order, as in English *sheep run*, which may be either a statement, a command or a qualified Noun (*a sheep-run*). Together with this extreme grammatical simplicity, the modern Chinese dialects, especially in the North, have been no less simplified phonetically; the number of distinct syllables used as words has been reduced to a few hundreds. The speakers have therefore to adopt special modes of expression to avoid the endless possibilities of confusion between words which in the written language are quite distinct. The latter has not only preserved ancient differences of pronunciation (as written English still distinguishes *son* and *sun*, *no* and *know*), but has had a peculiar history of its own.<sup>1</sup> At first each word was represented by a separate picture, and in their oldest known forms (appearing on Shang bronzes or 'oracle bones') the meaning of many of these ideograms is still plain to the eye. As in Egyptian hieroglyphics, much use was made of puns and also of determinatives, which were incorporated in the picture to form one character. Thus modifications of the character representing *fang* ('a square') were used to express ten other words of identical or similar pronunciation. In the course of time the forms of these characters have been changed beyond recognition and their number is said to have risen to about 70,000, though not more than a tenth of these are in everyday use; but the basic principle of their construction remains unchanged. They have a literally 'picturesque' quality which is a great aid to poetic expression, though we may hesitate to accept some of the picturesque explanations given of the origin of individual characters (e.g. that *peace* is depicted as 'a woman in a house' and *war* as 'two women in a house'). It has the further immense advantage

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Creel (*Studies in Early Chinese Culture I* [1938], p. 36) suggests that Chinese writing may have originated from the desire to send messages to the dead.

that a single written language has served as the medium for the whole of Chinese literature, changing surprisingly little since the form of the characters was approximately fixed c. 200 B.C. It scarcely reflects 2,000 years of growth and decay and those local differences that have always made spoken Pekingese completely unintelligible to a man from Canton. It is in fact remote from any spoken dialect—an illiterate cannot understand literary Chinese even if it is read aloud to him; even an educated listener may be puzzled to distinguish one word from another without the written character before his eyes. As it is naturally the work of years to achieve a real mastery of the written language, the literate class has remained a small one. The intellectual unity of China has been maintained at the cost of an immense gulf between the educated few and the illiterate masses. Moreover, while literary Chinese is universally recognized as an admirably rich and expressive language, it has tended to become fossilized. It is as though we could hardly express a new idea (much less coin or borrow a new word) without adding a new letter to the alphabet.<sup>1</sup> In modern times the greater flexibility of colloquial Chinese is being utilized to find expressions for the rush of new ideas, which can then be perfectly well expressed in writing. But in the past the rigidity of the literary language has helped to make conservatism of thought almost a prime virtue. There is a story that, when one unusually daring Chinese poet submitted a rather original ode to a group of acknowledged critics, they regarded it in stony silence till one of their number remarked: 'But, my dear sir, there is no such poem.' On the other hand, the peculiarities of the Chinese language have certainly contributed to the forcefulness and snappiness of Chinese literature, which is apparent even in translation. While Indian thought has to be extricated from a conglomeration of polysyllables, Chinese thought, laid bare in a few terse words, seems to hit the nail on the head with such ease that we may miss its depth. Where India demands the broad canvas of epic or fable, China is content with the toy screen of an epigram or a proverb.

But we are getting side-tracked down the primrose path of comparisons and generalizations; let us turn to the narrow way of history.

### *The Warring States*

In the 6th Century B.C., when our survey opens, the Chinese had already travelled a long way from primitive barbarism. That, at least, is how a modern European would probably put it. But the traditional Chinese philosophy of history excluded the notion of progress. In the beginning was the Golden Age of the saintly rulers Yao, Shun and Yü, who governed by direct mandate from Heaven—from that beneficent being whom the Chinese vaguely called 'the Lord on High' (*Shang-Ti*). In those days the virtue of the sovereign infected not only the people but even the forces of nature, so that wild oxen came out of the woods of their own accord to pull the peasant's plough. Under the descendants of Yü, the Hsia dynasty, the royal virtue steadily declined; when it had reached nearly to zero, there came a revolution, and the Hsia dynasty was replaced by the Shang. When the virtue inherited from the first Shang ruler had in its turn become exhausted, the divine mandate was transferred to the Chou dynasty (in 1122 B.C., according to the traditional dating). The proof of divine backing for the sacrilegious crime of rebellion was success. By the 6th Century the stock of inherited virtue in the Chou kings had sunk very low. Their authority was flouted by every duke or baron in the land. But no successor was in sight.

It is possible that this theory was first invented by the Chou to justify their conquest of the more civilized but allegedly 'decadent' and dissolute Shang. If archaeologists have found no trace of the Golden Age in China, they have

<sup>1</sup> Since Morse code is clearly not applicable, Chinese telegrams have to be sent as a series of numbers, referring to numbered words in a standard dictionary.

certainly found evidence of an artistic decline between Shang and Chou times. The periodic weakening of the central authority, followed by the establishment of a new power under a vigorous ruler from a new seat of government, finds obvious parallels elsewhere. In China it was accentuated by a continual shift of the centre of gravity as civilization spread outwards from its base in the middle Hoang-Ho valley. Each year a few more acres of swamp were drained, a few more patches of hillside cleared of their rank growth of brushwood and weeds. The peasant sang at his task:

'Our fathers stubbed up thistles that we might grow millet.'

The hunters and nomads who inhabited these wilds fought fiercely against the advancing settlers. A chief of the Western Barbarians in the 6th Century B.C. declared emphatically:

'Our drink, our food, our clothing differ from those of the Chinese states; we do not exchange courtesies with them; their speech and ours do not permit us to understand each other.' (Quoted in L. Maspéro: *La Chine antique*, p. 11.)

But he was championing a lost cause. The barbarians were everywhere adopting the food and clothing and speech of the Chinese. Population increased rapidly, but there was still no lack of land. The new way of life spread westward to the edge of the steppes and eastward to the sea; southward it climbed the mountains and overflowed into the valley of the Yang-Tze Kiang. But at this date the Yang-Tze principalities were still semi-barbarous,<sup>1</sup> and the culture of South China has never been quite assimilated to that of the North; this may be partly due to differences of race, climate and natural products, notably the use of rice as the staple food in place of millet. Today the last remnants of the real barbarians are to be found only in the mountainous country of the extreme south. If the central government attempted to keep control over this rapidly expanding area, it was faced with the perpetual difficulty that its most vigorous and warlike subjects were those most remote from the centre of authority, who could not be relied on to direct their arms exclusively against the outer barbarians.

The traditional history of the early Chou period (say 1100 to 500 B.C.) can be supplemented by archaeological material, especially inscribed bronzes. For some states there are fairly reliable annals. There are believed to be some authentic contemporary documents, along with much that is spurious, in the 'Document Classic' (*Shu Ching*); and most of the songs in the 'Poetry Classic' (*Shih Ching*)<sup>2</sup> date from the 8th or 7th Century. The sources depict a state of society curiously like the Feudal System of Mediaeval Europe. The king exercised direct rule over a portion only of his nominal dominions. From this royal demesne he could levy taxes (especially a share of the agricultural produce, in theory one tenth), with which to maintain his court, his officials and his army. The rest of the land was held by hereditary nobles of different ranks, roughly corresponding to the European duke, marquis, count and baron, who governed and taxed their own fiefs like independent princes. They were supposed to pay homage and a small tribute to their overlord and to give him military support in an emergency, but the vassals of a weak king made light of these obligations. The larger principalities were subdivided on the same principle: the duke ruled only a portion as his demesne, and the lesser vassals were no easier to control than their superiors. The aristocracy also included a multitude of retainers—poor relations holding

<sup>1</sup> A spokesman of one of these states (in 656 B.C.) is said to have maintained that even their cattle and horses would not interbreed with those of the Northerners!

<sup>2</sup> Translated as *The Book of Songs* by A. Waley [1937].

some minor office and paid by a grant of land as an appanage. As there was no currency other than cowrie shells and the cumbrous standard weights of bronze known as 'spade money' and 'knife money', salaries could be paid only by grants of land or a share in its produce.

All these nobles, from practically sovereign princes to landless hangers-on, formed a clearly defined class. They alone had family names and ancestors to whose spirits they could pray—there were said to be 100 families in China, but only about 30 names are known. They alone received the elaborate 'public school' education in religious observance and the Six Sciences—dancing, music, archery and chariot-driving in summer, writing and arithmetic in winter. The girls of this class were trained in obedience, in the mysteries surrounding the breeding of the silkworm and the spinning and weaving of silk, and in the religious rites in which they would have to participate after marriage. It was a duty incumbent on every male to beget sons who, by due observance of the prescribed ceremonies, would prolong the existence of his soul and those of his ancestors. In view of the recognized maxim that 'a man without a wife is like a coach without wheels', it was considered only prudent to carry a few spares. A noble youth normally married several wives at once, often sisters, who must not be bearers of his own family name; the eldest and her offspring took precedence. Later additions to the household had an inferior status as concubines. This polygamy, a product in part of the heavy male death-rate in the ceaseless wars of the period, went with an unquestioning assumption of the immeasurable inferiority of women. Yet Chinese poetry often shows a clear appreciation of the woman's point of view:

My husband is away on service,  
Not for days merely, or for months  
When will he come back to me?  
The fowls roost on their perches,  
And in the evening of the day  
The goats and cows come down and home.  
But my husband is away on service.  
Oh, if he be but kept from hunger and thirst!  
(*Shih Ching* quoted in H. G. Creel: *The Birth of China*, p. 294. No. 100 in Waley.)

There is no country whose annals are more full of the evils of petticoat government—of strong-minded, domineering dowager empresses and weak kings led to ruin by love of a scheming concubine. There is no less strong a tradition of female heroism—worthily represented at the present day.

The peasants were a race apart. Shepherded like domestic animals, they found their whole lives regulated by immemorial custom and ever-present officials.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the dry cold winters of northern China they lived as isolated families huddled in their mud-huts. During the steamy summers they abandoned their villages and lived a communal life in the fields, sleeping in rude shelters of branches. The yearly routine had two sharp breaks, in the windy days of spring and autumn when the air was alive with migrant birds and insects and gay with drifting peach-blossom or scarlet maple leaves. At these times of festival the youths and maidens of neighbouring villages joined in ritual dances and games of the Nuts-in-May variety. Spring, when (according to Chinese theory) the male element (*yang*) in Nature is dominant and attracts the female, was the season of betrothal; in autumn, when the female attracts the male, they settled down to married life. Among the peasants monogamy was the rule. Here and there, under the shadow of some feudal stronghold, stood a market town, to which the peasant brought his grain or cattle. Here lived a few skilled craftsmen and the small nucleus of a middle

<sup>1</sup> There are vivid pictures of peasant life in the *Shih Ching* (cf. e.g. No. 157 in Waley). The subject is discussed in detail in M. Granet: *La Pensée chinoise*.

class—traders, physicians, sorcerers, etc.—mainly recruited from the poorer members of the nobility, but less tightly bound than others to the rigid framework of feudal society. The produce of the communal labour of a village was divided between the villagers and their lord, who was seldom content with the tenth prescribed by theorists. Confucius in his young days, as an overseer of the duke of Lu, was obliged to exact a fifth; in a neighbouring state the lord took two-thirds. The ideal economics of feudalism are thus summed up by a writer of the 3rd Century B.C.:

‘The prince eats his taxes, the great lords eat their fiefs, the gentry eat their demesnes, the commoners eat their strength, the artisans and tradesmen eat the prices fixed by the state, the office-holders eat their offices, the managers eat their appanages; the government is in order; the people is at peace; there is no lack of riches.’

But was this harmonious balance ever attained in practice?

Besides men and beasts, China was inhabited at that time (as it still is) by vast numbers of fairies and goblins, chiefly malignant, and the programme of field labour as well as the ceremonial of the court was regulated by the urgent necessity of circumventing these bothersome but not very intelligent beings. The early kings (as in Egypt) were the only mediators between the people and Heaven. They symbolized or embodied the life of the community and of its herds and crops. In spring his Majesty lived in the eastern pavilion of his palace, wore green clothes and ate wheat and mutton; in summer he moved into the southern pavilion, changed into red and switched over to a diet of beans and poultry; and so forth. By the latter days of the Chou Dynasty these regulations, if they had ever been strictly enforced, had become more flexible in their application but perhaps even more complicated. The extreme importance of ceremonial and etiquette in Chinese life to this day is in part a heritage from these ancient taboos.

There was no organized priesthood in early China, and religious beliefs remained unformulated. The powers of the soil were worshipped at the sacred mound that formed the religious centre of every village. But the ancestral spirits, conceived as living somewhere in the upper air, were the chief objects of attention: the chapel in which the king sacrificed to his forbears became practically the temple of a state cult. Possibly the supreme *Shang-Ti*, who was often consulted on the ‘oracle bones’ on questions of peace and war, was originally the divine ancestor of the Shang. In Chou times he was identified with Heaven—an impersonal power often invoked by moralists but playing little part in the life of the people. A maiden was given each year in ‘marriage’ to the Hoang-Ho, and a great man’s wives and servants were sometimes buried with him. In the Shang city of An-Yang (as excavations prove) this form of human sacrifice had been practised on a colossal scale, but it was now dying out. The Chinese, in accordance with the stock theory of retrogression, held that it had originated in 580 B.C. out of the supposedly older custom of burying effigies—a reversal of what a modern European would assume to be the natural sequence. Here is a native account of how the practice finally lapsed:

‘When Tze-Chü died, his wife and secretary took counsel together as to who should be interred with him. All was settled before the arrival of his brother; and then they informed him, saying: “The deceased requires someone to attend on him in the nether world. We must ask you to go down with his body into the grave.” “Burial of the living with the dead,” replied he, “is not in accordance with established rites. Still, as you say someone is wanted to attend upon the deceased, who better fitted than his wife and

secretary? If this contingency can be avoided altogether, I am willing; if not, then the duty will devolve upon you two." From this time forth the custom fell into desuetude.' (T'an-Kung [3rd Century B.C.] in H. A. Giles: *Gems of Chinese Literature: Prose*, p. 40.)

Here is another illustration of the attitude of a more civilized age:

'In summer there was a great drought. Thereupon the duke wished to burn a wizard; but his chief minister said to him: "That will avail nothing against the drought. Rather mend the city walls; diminish consumption; be economical; and devote every energy to gathering in the harvest. . . . What can a wizard do for you? If God now desires his death, he might as well never have been born. And, if he can cause a drought, to burn him would only make it worse." The duke followed this advice; and in the ensuing season, although there was distress, it was not very bad.' (The *Tso-Chuan* [4th Century B.C.?], *Ibid*, p. 8.)

Human life in the Feudal Age was very cheap. Captives were massacred or enslaved. Criminals or innocent victims of intrigue were executed or mutilated wholesale at the arbitrary command of a sovereign. There was no fixed law to which the people could appeal. When one state adopted a written code in 536 B.C., its author is said to have received this protest:

'The kings of old reached their decisions in criminal cases after careful deliberation on the particular circumstances of the case in hand; they did not set up general laws. . . . They instituted places of salary and position to encourage the people to conform to the right; they strictly laid down punishments to awe them from excesses; . . . and they sought to have in the highest positions sage and loyal persons and teachers of gentle kindness. . . . When the people know what the exact laws are, then they do not stand in awe of their superiors. They come to have a contentious spirit, and make their appeal to verbal technicalities, hoping thus to be successful in their argument. . . . It is the decay of government that leads to the making of criminal codes.' (The *Tso-Chuan* in H. G. Creel: *Birth of China*, p. 353.)

So, if oppressed subjects were disposed to be 'contentious', they were left with no appeal except to the memory of the wise benevolence of 'the kings of old'.

In the 6th Century, China was suffering the drawbacks of despotism without its advantages. The Chou kings at Lo-Yang, eclipsed in temporal power by at least half a dozen of their nominal vassals, were supreme only in the religious sphere. As chief worshippers of the divine ancestors of the nation, they symbolized the remembered or imagined unity of Chinese civilization—just as, amid the wreckage of feudal Europe, the Pope embodied 'the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof'. And in China, as in Europe, the Feudal Age was an age of continual fighting and resultant lawlessness: native historians distinguish it as the Age of the Warring States. The peasantry, over-taxed and impoverished when they were spared from massacre, were ignorant and helpless: they accepted what resignedly, as they did locusts and famine and the other plagues of life. To the ruling class, the turbulent barons and their vassals, the disorder of the times was nothing to grumble at. Life was full of gaiety and good fellowship, wine, woman and song, the joys of the chase and the noble sport of war. The wars of that age seemed directed to no particular end: they were immemorial feuds, 'gentlemen's disagreements', resumed summer after summer like the Test Matches and seemingly just about as final and decisive. But in fact

they tended to grow grimmer as time went on: unsporting princes really conquered their weaker neighbours; states banded together for safety—without finding it; even large principalities fell, and were dismembered by squabbling allies. The growing sense of distrust found expression in the Convention of Puo (546 B.C.), when delegates of a dozen leading powers swore eternal peace and friendship. This was referred to, rather ominously, by a writer in 1919 as 'the first League of Nations'. It was a diplomats' league, and lasted till it appeared to be to the interest of one of the parties to break it. So the game went on as before.

But there was a growing class of men who not only desired order but had enough knowledge at least to formulate in words their discontent and their proposals for putting the world to rights. These critics were generally found among the poorer ranks of the aristocracy: leisured students of an idealized past; administrators with the artist's impulse to do their job efficiently; prospering merchants who realized that war does not pay; men concerned with the arts of peace, and many of them genuinely sensitive to the suffering about them. It was this class that produced, in the last three centuries of the Chou Dynasty (ending in 221 B.C.), a group of thinkers and teachers who laid the intellectual foundations on which Chinese civilization has ever since been built. It is at least a curious coincidence that the same three centuries saw the foundations of modern Europe being laid by the Greeks.

### *The Way of the Mystic*

The Chinese thinkers found their raw material in a world of ideas that is sometimes classed (rather sweepingly) as pre-scientific and pre-moral—the world of the savage magician who seeks to feel his way through the jungle of sense-impressions by the aid of clues that more often lead astray than aright. And they were no more successful than their European brethren in escaping completely from the realm of magic and myth.

It was perhaps the effort to construct a calendar in a climate dominated by violent seasonal changes that led to the conception of nature in all its aspects as an alternation of *yin* and *yang*: these words, which seem originally to have denoted respectively the shady and the sunny slope of a valley, came to symbolize winter and summer, dark and light, cold and heat, rest and motion, female and male, death and birth, and the recurring phases of decay and rejuvenation which the Chinese detected in their history. In an early treatise on divination we read: 'One *yin*, one *yang*, that is *tao*.' *Tao* is literally 'the way'; here we may understand it as 'the way along which things travel', 'the way things happen' or (in a more practical sense) 'the way to make things happen'. In time 'the *tao* of man' comes to mean something very like 'reason', and 'the *tao* of the universe' becomes 'Nature', a notion that easily passes into that of a personal God; we may compare the Buddhist *dharma*, and the 'reason' or 'Word' (*logos*) of the Fourth Gospel, or Christ's saying 'I am the Way'. With *tao* is often coupled *tê*, a magical potency or *mana* that contains the germs of the scientific notion of 'force' and the ethical notion of 'virtue'. The scientific potentialities of these ideas remained unexplored in China, where men never arrived at the notion of an orderly nature, regulated by 'laws' that men could discover and turn to account for their own ends.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, they provided a starting-point for several theories of a moral order to which human society ought ideally to conform.

In China, as elsewhere, there were mystics. They had evolved by experience, or conceivably had learnt from India, a form of *yoga*, control of breathing, steady contemplation, fasting of the body and 'fasting of the heart', leading up to that ecstatic 'deliverance' which has been described in very similar words by mystics

<sup>1</sup> Mencius, however, remarks incidentally that by studying the 'habits' of the stars men may predict their movements.



all the world over. To the Chinese it was a direct vision of *tao* as 'appearance without form, speech without words, a square without angles'. In China even the visionary who had penetrated to the heart of this mystery where all human thought and effort seem futile translated his vision into a political theory, albeit a somewhat negative one.

The traditional founder of this mystical doctrine of *Taoism* is a shadowy figure best known simply as the Old Master (Lao-Tze), who is supposed to have lived in the 6th Century and to have been keeper of the state archives of the Chou kings at Lo-Yang. Of the sayings that pass under his name, many are dark and mystifying, but some perhaps come nearer than those of any other teacher to the language of Christ:

'Keep behind and you shall be put in front; keep out and you shall be kept in.

'He who grasps more than he can hold would be better without any; he who strikes with a sharp point will not himself be safe for long. . . .

'To the good I would be good. To the not-good I would also be good—in order to make them good. . . .

'Recompense injury with kindness.' (Giles: *Gems*, p. 3.)

Much of Lao-Tze's teaching was incorporated with later matter in the *Tao-Tê Ching*.<sup>1</sup> This describes the sage as withdrawing himself from society and returning to Nature, and yet 'all the time in the most perfect way helping men'. He is resorting to the only power that is of any avail to solve man's practical problems:

He who by Tao purposes to help a ruler of men

Will oppose all conquest by force of arms;

For such things are wont to rebound.

Where armics are, thorns and brambles grow.

The raising of a great host is followed by a year of dearth.

Therefore a good general effects his purpose and then stops; he does not take further advantage of his victory. . . .

He fulfils his purpose but without vainglory or violence.

For what has a time of vigour also has a time of decay.

This [violence] is against Tao,

And what is against Tao will soon perish. (30)

In the days of old those who practised Tao with success did not by means of it enlighten the people, but on the contrary sought to make them ignorant.

The more knowledge people have, the harder they are to rule. (65)

All attempts to reform society must be based on the spirit, not on the letter:

After Tao was lost, then came the 'power' [*Tê*];

After the 'power' was lost, then came human kindness.

After human kindness was lost, then came morality.

After morality was lost, then came ritual.

Now ritual is the mere husk of loyalty and promise-keeping. (38)

It was when the nearest of kin were no longer at peace

That there was talk of 'dutiful sons';

Nor till fatherland was dark with strife

Did we hear of 'loyal henchmen'. (18)

This then is the Taoist Utopia:

'Given a small country with few inhabitants, the sage could bring it about that, though there should be among the people contrivances requiring a hundred times less labour, they would not use them. They would be willing to lay down their lives in defence of their homes rather than emigrate [a way of escape from oppression often recommended and sometimes adopted].

<sup>1</sup> Translated as *The Way and its Power* by A. Waley, who dates it about 240 B.C.

There might still be boats and carriages, but no one would go in them; there might still be weapons of war, but no one would drill with them. The people would have no use for any form of writing save knotted ropes, would be contented with their food, pleased with their clothing, satisfied with their homes, glad in their rustic tasks. The next place might be so near at hand that one could hear the cocks crowing in it, the dogs barking; but the people would grow old and die without ever having been there.' (80)

This last passage recurs among the Taoist writings that pass under the name of Chuang-Tze,<sup>1</sup> in which the revolt against civilization is even more explicit:

'In the Golden Age, good men were not appreciated; ability was not conspicuous. Rulers were mere beacons, while the people were free as the wild deer. . . . They loved one another without being conscious of charity. . . . They acted freely in all things without recognizing obligations to anyone. Thus their deeds left no trace; their affairs were not handed down to posterity. (12)

'Horses have hoofs to carry them over frost and snow; hair, to protect them from wind and cold. They eat grass and drink water and fling up their heels over the champaign. Such is the real nature of horses. Palatial dwellings are of no use to them. One day Poh-Loh appeared, saying, "I understand the management of horses." So he branded them, and clipped them, and pared their hoofs, and put halters on them, tying them up by the head and shackling them by the feet, and disposing them in stables, with the result that two or three in every ten died. Then he kept them hungry and thirsty, trotting them and galloping them, and grooming and trimming, with the misery of the tasselled bridle before and the fear of the knotted whip behind, until more than half of them were dead.

'The potter says: "I can do what I will with clay. If I want it round, I use compasses; if rectangular, a square." The carpenter says: "I can do what I will with wood. If I want it curved, I use an arc; if straight, a line." But on what grounds can we think that the natures of clay and wood desire this application of compasses and square, of arc and line? Nevertheless, every age extols Poh Loh for his skill in managing horses, and potters and carpenters for their skill with clay and wood. Those who govern the empire make the same mistake.

'The people have certain natural instincts—to weave and clothe themselves, to till and feed themselves. These are common to all humanity, and all are agreed thereon. Such instincts are called "Heaven-sent". And so in the days when natural instincts prevailed, men moved quietly and gazed steadily. There were no roads over mountains, nor boats nor bridges over water. All things were produced, each for its proper sphere. . . . Man dwelt with beasts and birds and all creation was one. There were no distinctions of good and bad men. Being all equally without knowledge, their virtue could not go astray. Being all equally without evil desires, they were in a state of natural integrity, the perfection of human existence. But, when Sages appeared, tripping people over charity and fettering with duty to one's neighbour, doubt found its way into the world. And then, with their gushing over ceremony and fussing over music, the empire became divided against itself.' (9)

Very different is the true Sage:

<sup>1</sup> Translated by H. A. Giles.

'He looks up to God, but does not offer to aid. He perfects his virtue, but does not involve himself. He guides himself by Tao, but makes no plans. He identifies himself with charity, but does not rely on it. . . . He accommodates himself to matter and does not ignore it. While there should be no action, there should also be no inaction. He who is not divinely enlightened will not be sublimely pure. He who has not clear apprehension of Tao will find this beyond his reach. And he who is not enlightened by Tao—alas indeed for him! What then is Tao? There is the Tao of God and the Tao of man. Inaction and compliance make the Tao of God: action and entanglement the Tao of man. The Tao of God is fundamental; the Tao of man is accidental. The distance which separates them is great. Let us all take heed thereto.' (11)

Here are words that Chuang-Tze puts into the mouth of a hermit of old:

'Those who possess Tao are princes in this life and rulers in the hereafter. Those who do not possess Tao behold the light of day in this life and become clods of earth in the hereafter. Nowadays, all living things spring from the dust and to the dust return. But I will lead you through the portals of Eternity into the domain of Infinity. My light is the light of sun and moon. My life is the life of heaven and earth. I know not who comes nor who goes. Men may all die, but I endure for ever.' (11)

What after all is death?

'Suppose that the boiling metal [bronze] in a smelting-pot were to bubble up and say "Make of me a magic sword" I think the caster would reject the metal as uncanny [or 'ill-tempered']. And if a sinner like myself were to say to God "Make of me a man, make of me a man!" I think he too would reject me as uncanny. The universe is the smelting-pot, and God is the caster. I shall go whithersoever I am sent, to wake unconscious of the past, as a man wakes from a dreamless sleep.' (6)

From these heights Taoism sank back into the slough of superstition and quackery that has engulfed so many religious movements. The Taoists became an organized priesthood which bamboozled the ignorant with elixirs to prolong earthly life indefinitely, and other claims equally fatuous. When Buddhist priests tried to get a footing in China, the Taoists fought fiercely against rivals who purveyed a line of goods so similar to their own. The Chinese Buddhists claimed Lao-Tze as a disciple of their Master. Though this cannot be true in the literal sense, the two movements sprang from the same source psychologically and perhaps even historically. The essence of Buddhism is in Lao-Tze's:

'When merit has been achieved, do not take it to yourself; for, if you do not take it to yourself, it shall never be taken from you.' (Giles: *Gems*, p. 2.)

When the two religions came in conflict, Taoism failed to compete in metaphysical subtlety or popular appeal with the Indian creed in its *Mahāyāna* form. A Chinese writer remarks that Buddhism borrowed what was best in Taoism and 'requited the gem with a worthless stone'. The Taoist monks who still survive in China, especially in the south, are said to differ little from their Buddhist brethren.

### *The Way of the Statesman*

Even at its best, Taoism was better suited to the Indian temperament than to the practical Chinese, though it expresses a mood to which perhaps all humanity is subject at times. It was not to the mystic that China turned for enlightenment,

but to the man of affairs. Such a one was Kuan-Chung, whose substitution of conciliation for terrorism enabled his master, duke Huan of Ch'i, to unite the Warring States for a time under his leadership. There emerged a whole class of statesmen, or would-be statesmen, who wandered from court to court offering their rival specifics for successful government. A humble member of this class was the poor 'knight' of Lu, known to his followers as Master K'ung (K'ung Fu-Tze, Latinized as *Confucius*.) His life is traditionally dated 551-479 B.C., and the legends that have grown up around it furnish material for a fairly copious biography. The most authentic source is the volume of Collected Sayings (*Analects*),<sup>1</sup> of which the oldest part (Books III-IX?) may have been put into writing within a century or so of his death. It is no record of heroic self-sacrifice crowned by martyrdom, but a plain tale of a thoughtful, humorous, resolute man, a little crotchety at times but very kind-hearted, distressed by the folly and suffering of the age and modestly convinced of his own ability to cure them.

'The Master's manner was affable yet firm, commanding but not harsh, polite but easy. . . . In his leisure hours his manner was very free-and-easy, and his expression alert and cheerful. . . . There were four things that he wholly eschewed; he took nothing for granted, he was never overpositive, never obstinate, never egotistic.

'The Master said: I can claim that at Court I have duly served the Duke and his officers; at home, my father and elder brother. As regards matters of mourning I am conscious of no neglect, nor have I ever been overcome with wine. Concerning these things at any rate my mind is quite at rest. . . . I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own. I have been faithful to and loved the Ancients. I have listened in silence and noted what was said; I have never grown tired of learning nor wearied of teaching others what I have learnt. These are merits which I can confidently claim. But the thought that I have left my moral power (*te*) untended, my learning unperfected; that I have heard of righteous men, but been unable to go to them; have heard of evil men, but been unable to reform them—it is these thoughts that disquiet me. . . . As to being a Divine Sage or even a Good Man, far be it from me to make any such claim.' (vii, 37, 4; ix, 4, 15; vii, 1-3, 33.)

When it was pointed out to him that a compliment he had paid to a former duke of Lu was more loyal than veracious, he replied:

'I am a fortunate man. If by any chance I make a mistake, people are certain to hear of it.' (vii, 30.)

English readers note with approval that he praised the interchange of courtesies between competitors at an archery match, and that 'when fowling he did not aim at a roosting bird' (vii, 26).

His teaching was practical rather than profound. Like the Buddha, he fought shy of religion and metaphysics. In his insistence on the outward observance of certain traditional rules of conduct he seemed at times like the Pharisees to be mainly interested in 'washing the outside of the platter'. One disciple declared:

'Our Master's views concerning culture and the outward insignia of goodness we are permitted to hear; but about man's nature and the ways of Heaven he will not tell us anything at all.' (v, 12.)

<sup>1</sup> The translation used here is by A. Waley (1938), who tries to get back to the original meaning behind the orthodox interpretations.

But other passages show a clear distinction between the letter and the spirit. And many of his commonplaces were more original than they sound in our ears or than he himself realized. He admitted (iii, 9) that, for 'lack of documents and of learned men', he could not recover the ritual of the bygone dynasties, in which of course true Goodness was embodied. In seeking to restore the Way of the Ancients he was actually an unconscious pioneer in the transformation of a code of taboos, whose purpose was primarily magical, into a code of morals, and still more of manners, based on a sensitive consideration for the feelings of others.

'The Master took four subjects for his teaching: culture, conduct of affairs, loyalty to superiors and the keeping of promises. . . . He seldom spoke of profit or fate or [absolute] Goodness. . . . He never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders [of nature] or spirits. (vii, 24; ix, 1; vii, 20.)

'The Master said: He who devotes himself to securing for his subjects what it is right they should have, who by respect for Spirits keeps them at a distance, may be termed wise. (vi, 20.)

'The Master said: If I am not present [in thought] at a sacrifice, it is as though there were no sacrifice. (iii, 12.)

'The Master said: High office filled by men with narrow views, ritual performed without reverence, the forms of mourning observed without grief—these are things I cannot bear to see. (iii, 26.)

'The Master said: Be of unwavering good faith, love learning, if attacked be ready to die for the good Way (*tao*). Do not enter a State that pursues dangerous courses, nor stay in one where the people have rebelled. When the Way prevails under Heaven, then show yourself; when it does not prevail, then hide. When the Way prevails in your own land, count it a disgrace to be needy and obscure; when the Way does not prevail in your land, then count it a disgrace to be rich and honoured.' (viii, 13.)

Confucius' *tao* may almost be translated 'order'. Against the Taoist cry of 'Back to Nature!' he championed orderly Civilization, with all its artificial trappings. He was fond (in Chuang-Tze's words) of 'gushing over ceremony and fussing over music', for music too was a manifestation of harmony and order. He objected to Lao-Tze's doctrine of returning good for evil, as a violation of order: 'for good a man should return good; for evil, justice'. To maintain order, in his personal relations and (if the occasion offered) in the State, was the first duty of a 'gentleman'.<sup>1</sup> Four virtues that belong to the *tao* of the gentleman are these:

'In his private conduct he is courteous; in serving his master, punctilious; in providing for the needs of the people, generous beyond their due; in exacting service from them, just.' (v, 15.)

It goes without saying that Confucius was no democrat. He laid the responsibility for government squarely on the ruling class.

'The common people can be made to follow *tao*; they cannot be made to understand it.' (viii, 9.)

On the other hand,

'You may rob the Three Armies of their commander, but you cannot deprive the humblest peasant of his opinion.' (ix, 25.)

<sup>1</sup> Confucius attached great importance to 'right relations' not only among persons but (in a special sense) between things and their names; he regarded the misuse of language as one of the main roots of social evil.

Legend presents a glowing, if hardly convincing, picture of the Golden Age that followed when the Master, as chief minister of Lu, had a brief opportunity to put his theories into practice. But it is questionable whether, in his lifetime, his reputation extended much beyond the small circle of devoted pupils to whom he expounded the ballads and chronicles of his country as textbooks of ethics and of statesmanship. He expected his pupils to contribute their share to the lessons: he would give them 'one corner' of the matter, and looked to them to build up the other three. He rebuked one of them for uncritical admiration. An occasional note of bitterness in the *Analects* seems to support the tradition that most of his life was a sequence of petty discomforts, humiliations and disappointments: he had never found one man truly steadfast, nor one who valued the cultivation of moral force (*tê*) above the gratification of sensual desire. He is said to have died in the belief that he had failed utterly, exclaiming at the last: "For a long time the world has been out of order; there is no one who understands how to follow me."

Some four centuries later, the historian Sze-Ma Ch'ien wrote as follows:

'While reading the works of Confucius, I have always fancied I could see the man as he was in life; and when I went to Lu I actually beheld his carriage, his robes, and the material parts of his ceremonial usages. There were his descendants practising the old rites in their ancestral home; and I lingered on, unable to tear myself away. Many are the princes and prophets that the world has seen in its time, glorious in life, forgotten in death. But Confucius, though only a humble member of the cotton-clothed masses, remains among us after many generations. He is the model for such as would be wise. By all, from the Son of Heaven down to the meanest student, the supremacy of his principles is fully and freely admitted. He may indeed be pronounced the divinest of men.' (Giles: *Gems*, p. 64.)

Today the lineal descendants of the Master, who number some 20,000, still keep up the ancestral rites, and 'Confucianism' ranks (rather misleadingly, perhaps) as one of the great religions of the world.

### *Rival Seekers of the Way*

The pre-eminence of the Confucian school was not attained all at once. There were rival teachers in the field, to whom the problem of conduct presented itself very differently; but of most of them very little is known. One of the most interesting is 'the Chinese Epicurus', Yang-Chu, who exercised his lively wit in thoroughly modern fashion in debunking the saints and sages of Antiquity. He held that the individual should not be sacrificed to the community: everyone should seek fulfilment for his own natural desires, indifferent to fame and length of years, giving nothing and accepting nothing. The wise 'would not have a single hair destroyed for the benefit of the whole world; neither would they take the whole world for their own benefit'. If all acted thus, 'the world would be orderly'. Even so did the Manchester School of economists persuade themselves that, if every man were free to seek his own good, the resultant would be 'the greatest good of the greatest number'.

At the other extreme stood Micius (Mih-Tze, Mo-Ti).<sup>1</sup> Like most Chinese thinkers, he started from the question (which is the main theme of this book): 'What is the reason for the disorder in the world?' He answered: 'Because the gentlemen of the world do not understand the will of Heaven, which is to love all the people in the world universally.' He did not merely assert this; he attempted to prove it—a procedure not always followed by dogmatists and less obvious

<sup>1</sup> The following passages are condensed from writings of Micius or the Mician school, translated by Y. P. Mei (*The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*).

and natural than it might seem to modern Europeans, who have been reared (whether they know it or not) in the tradition of Greek logic.

'To accomplish anything whatsoever one must have standards. Even artisans have their standards: they make square objects according to the square, circular ones according to the compasses. Even unskilled labourers, though they have not attained accuracy, do better by following these standards. But the governors of the Empire and the large states are less intelligent: they do not observe their standards. To follow the right standard it is not enough to imitate parents, teachers or rulers: there are many of all these classes, but few are fit to be guides. The only certain standard is the will of Heaven, which is all-inclusive and impartial in its activities, abiding and untiring in its guidance. Heaven loves and benefits men universally; it claims all and accepts offerings from all. It blesses those who love and benefit one another and curses those who hate and harm one another.' (iv, pp. 13-15.)

Micius never doubted that the will of Heaven, thus defined, was written large in history. But this was not his sole criterion.

'To expound a doctrine without regard to the standard is like trying to tell east from west on a spinning potter's wheel. To distinguish right from wrong, benefit from harm, there must be three tests: a doctrine must be *based* on the deeds of the ancient sage-kings, *verified* by the senses of hearing and sight of the common people, and *applied* by adopting it in government and observing its benefits to the country and the people.' (xxxv, pp. 182-183.)

He claimed that his doctrine would pass these tests, and dealt cogently with two objections.

'We know that universal love was the way of the sage kings. The sources of our knowledge lie in what is written on the bamboos and silk, what is engraved on metal and stones, and what is cut in the [bronze] vessels to be handed down to posterity. . . .

'At present feudal lords have learnt only to love their own states and not those of others; therefore they do not scruple to attack other states. Heads of houses have learnt only to love their own houses; therefore they do not scruple to usurp other houses. Individuals have learnt only to love themselves; therefore they do not scruple to injure others. . . . When all the people in the world love one another, then the strong will not overpower the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the wealthy will not mock the poor, the honoured will not disdain the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the simple. (xvi, p. 92; xv, pp. 81-82.)

'The Confucian says: Love among relations should depend on the degree of relationship, and honour to the virtuous should be graded. . . . But it is certain that a filial son would desire that others should love his parents. Therefore he should first love others' parents, that they might love his parents in return. (xxxix, p. 200; xv, p. 95.)

'The gentlemen of the world would say: "So far so good. It is of course very excellent when love becomes universal. But it is only a difficult and distant ideal." Yet there are instances of men who, to conform to the wishes of a superior, have been willing to wear coarse clothing, to fast or to be burnt

alive, which are the hardest things in the world, whereas universal love and mutual aid are beneficial and easy beyond a doubt.' (xv, pp. 83-84.)

Ignorance of this doctrine leads to murder and war, which is murder many times over and therefore many times as sinful (though there are occasions when it is justified).<sup>1</sup>

'The lords in the large states compete in saying: "Being a big state, if I do not attack the small states, in what way am I big?" Therefore they mustered their warriors and arrayed their boats and chariots to attack some innocent state. They broke into its borders, trampled down its fields, felled its trees, tore down its inner and outer city walls, filled up its moats and ditches, burned its ancestral temples and seized and killed its sacrificial victims. Of the people, the strong were killed and the weak brought back in chains and ropes. The men were turned into servants and grooms and bondsmen, the women into handmaids. Yet the warring lord did not even know that this is unmagnanimous and unrighteous. He announced to the neighbouring lords: "I have attacked a state, defeated an army and killed so many generals." And the neighbouring lords with furs and silk sent envoys to offer congratulations. And the warring lords recorded their victory on the bamboos and silk and kept them in the archives, so that their descendants would imitate it. . . .

'Some small states, however, the great states do not attack, and this because these small states are well stored with supplies, their inner and outer city walls are in repair, and in them the superior and subordinates are harmonious.' (xxviii, p. 156; xxv, p. 128.)

Almost as wasteful as war are the luxury and display of the rich and those ritual and aesthetic activities summed up in the word 'music' (including poetry and dancing).

'The ancient sage kings ordained thrift, saying: "All you artisans and workers, carpenters and tanners, potters and smiths, do what you can do. Stop when the needs of the people are satisfied." They bade men stop eating when hunger was satiated, without craving delicacies from far countries, and be content to wear blue or grey silk in winter for warmth and linen in summer for coolness, and carry a plain two-edged sword for defence against wild beasts. . . . In those days men lived in caves [or 'pits'] dug at the side of hills and mounds. The sage kings felt quite concerned, thinking that the caves might keep off the wind and cold in winter, but that in summer they would be wet below and steaming above, which might hurt the health of the people. So they authorized the building of houses such that the sides keep off wind and cold, the roof keeps off rain, wind and dew, within they are clean enough for sacrificial purposes and the partition is high enough to separate the men from the women. What causes extra expense but adds no benefit to the people, the sage kings would not undertake. . . .<sup>2</sup>

'Micius asked a Confucian why he pursued music. He answered: "For music's sake." Micius said: "We build houses to keep off the cold in winter and the heat in summer and to separate men from women. But to say 'Music is pursued for music's sake' is as though one were to say 'Houses are built for houses' sake'."

<sup>1</sup> For Micius' attitude to war and the opposite 'guns or butter' view, see A. Waley: *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* [1939], pp. 175, 183, 212, 220.

<sup>2</sup> Micius esteems a linch-pin a greater triumph of skill than a flying machine, because it is more useful.





[Hamish Hamilton]

CONFUCIUS AS TAX COLLECTOR



[Hamish Hamilton]

CONFUCIUS DISCUSSING ANCIENT MUSIC WITH TAO I



Photo taken by Capt G S C Gordon

TOMB OF CONFUCIUS IN LU



TAITI WENT BY SHIH HUANG TI TO RETRIEVE A MAGIC CAULDRON FROM A RIVER

'Micius does not deny that the sounds of the big bell, the booming drum, the psaltery and the reed pipes are pleasant, carvings and ornaments delightful, fried and broiled meats of grass-fed and grain-fed animals appetizing, high towers, stately arbours and quiet villas comfortable. But when rulers desire to construct musical instruments they collect heavy taxes from the people, no less than for boats or carts. If music were as useful as boats or carts, they would not be to blame. But music does not serve the three great needs of the people—food, shelter and rest—or bring order into the chaos of the world. . . . Birds, beasts and insects have feathers and furs for coats, hoofs and claws for shoes, water and grass for meat and drink. Therefore the males do not sow or plant nor the females spin or weave, yet food and clothing are provided. Men are different: those who exert themselves will live; those who do not cannot live. If they gave their time and energy to music, the rulers would neglect the hearing of lawsuits and the business of government, so that the country would be in chaos; the gentlemen would have less strength and wisdom to spare for attendance at the courts and for tax-gathering, so that the granaries and treasury would not be filled; the farmers would be later in starting to work and earlier in returning, so that there would be a shortage of soya and millet; the women would not rise to their task at dawn and retire late at night, so there would be a shortage of silken and linen cloth. Therefore to have music is wrong.' (xxi, pp. 120-122; xlviii, p. 237; xxxii, pp. 175-180.)

Chuang-Tze scornfully admits that the Mician brotherhood lived up to these Puritanical principles: 'They are clad in sheepskin jackets, shod with sandals or clogs; they work day and night and regard self-denial as attainment,' Micius himself began by wishing that he might be a farmer and feed all mankind, or a weaver and clothe all mankind, or a soldier and overcome all men's enemies; but he eventually came to believe that the only way to serve all mankind was to master the *Tao* of the ancient sage kings and teach it first to rulers and then to the common folk. His aim was consistently practical: 'To expound at length what cannot modify conduct is just to wear out one's mouth.' Though he blamed the Confucians for 'discriminations in love between the respectable and the humble', he was by no means a Leveller.

'Righteousness is the standard, without which the world will be disorderly. The dull and lowly cannot make the standard, but only the wise and honourable. . . . The common folk receive the standard from the scholars [or 'knights'], the scholars from the ministers, the ministers from the feudal lords, the lords from the emperor, and the emperor from Heaven. . . . In the beginning there was no ruler and everybody was independent. Thus where there was one man there was one purpose, where there were ten men there were ten purposes, and so forth. All men approved their own ideas and disapproved those of others. And there was strife among both weak and strong. Thereupon Heaven wished to unify the standards in the world. The most virtuous was selected and made emperor. Conscious of the insufficiency of his power alone to govern the empire, he chose the next best in virtue and wisdom and exalted them to be his ministers. They in turn chose subordinates, and so downwards—not for their own ease but to share out the task and have helpers in spreading the light of Heaven.' (xiii, p. 71.)

The Heaven that stands at the head of this hierarchy is not the cold abstraction of most Chinese thinkers, but a being who 'loves all men dearly' and is the object of a personal worship. In the middle sphere between Heaven and earth was the

world of spirits, in which Micius believed because they appeared to satisfy his second test ('the senses of sight and hearing of the multitude') and helped to reinforce his moral teaching. He assailed fatalism as an excuse for laziness and licence—'an invention of the wicked kings and the practice of miserable men'.

From the extremes of individualism and universalism China was recalled to the Middle Way of Confucius by Mencius (Méng-Tze).

'Mencius said: How should I love wrangling? I cannot help doing it. All below heaven was born long ago. Now there is order, now there is confusion. . . . In these times the Way (*tao*) has dwindled. No holy king arises; the feudal lords are loose and unbridled; idle knights [or 'scholars'] argue foolishly. The words of Yang-Chu and Mo-Ti [Micius] fill all below heaven. Yang's school is for self. It has no lord. Mo's school loves all alike. It has no father. Without father and without lord we are birds or beasts. . . . If the ways of Yang and Mo are not stopped, if the way of Confucius is not seen, crooked words will bewitch the people, and choke love and right. When love and right are choked, beasts are led to eat men, and men will eat each other.' (vi, 9. The translation is by L. A. Lyall.)

Mencius was in truth no wrangler; he was by temperament a reconciler, one who sought to find good in everything and appealed to men's hearts rather than their heads. The King need not be ashamed of loving music—even 'the popular music of today'; if he loved it so well that he wished to enhance his pleasure by sharing it with as many as possible of his people, all would be harmony in the state. By all means let him love daring; king Wu (founder of the Chou Dynasty) loved daring, and all below heaven had peace. It is well that he should love goods and beauty—and give the people their share.

What is there wrong in curbing thy lord?  
Curbing thy lord is loving thy lord. (ii. 4.)

Much though Mencius revered his Master ('From the birth of the people till now there has been no one greater than Confucius'), he had no real sympathy with his devotion to time-honoured ceremonies, but dwelt rather on current problems.

'The people's business cannot wait. . . . The way of the people is this: if they have a stable living, they have stable hearts; without a stable living, they have no stable hearts. And without stable hearts they will sink into crime. But to pursue and punish them for this is to snare the people. . . .

'At market, if there are by-laws but no tax on goods, every trader below heaven is glad and wishes to stall in that market. At barriers, if men are questioned but there are no tolls, every stranger below heaven is glad and wishes to travel those roads. If the ploughman renders service but not a tax, every tiller below heaven is glad and wishes to plough those wilds.' (v, 3; iii, 5.)

But he does not share Micius' hostility towards innocent amusement.

'To serve our kin is love's core; to follow our elders is the core of right; to understand these two, and not depart from them, is the core of wisdom; to apportion them and adorn them is the core of courtesy; to delight in them is music's core. Delight is life; life cannot be held in; and, as we cannot hold it in, our feet stamp and our hands dance, without our knowing it.' (vii, 27.)

Mencius thus praises 'music' not as something fixed and sanctified by tradition but as a spontaneous expression of feeling. And it is not surprising to find him sharing the Taoist faith in the goodness of the 'natural man': man's nature tends to goodness as water flows downhill (a simile borrowed from Micius); only by violence can you make it splash in the contrary direction. It was the nature of Ox Hill to be fair with trees; only under the axe of the builder did it lose its natural wooded beauty. But nature must be aided: the carpenter needs square and compasses, though they will not suffice to make him master of his craft. One man is too lazy to weed; another pulls up his corn to help it to grow. The ascetic and the zealot have their faults. But they are better than the worldly man.

'Blame him, there is nothing to take up; prick him, there is nothing to prick! He goes with the stream of custom, he is one with the foul times. His being seems faithful and true, his deeds seem clean and honest; the many are all pleased with him, he thinks himself in the right; but the way of the sage kings cannot be travelled in his company. So he is said to be the bane of the mind.' (xiv, 37.)

The right Way is the Middle Way of the Confucian knight or scholar.

'Man's heart is love. Man's road is right. . . . If a man's dog or hen strays, he knows where to seek it; but when his heart strays he knows not where to seek it! The scholar's way is no more than seeking our stray heart.' (xi, 11.)

Mencius' doctrine of innate human goodness is now a dogma of orthodox Confucianism. But it has really no place in a system that leaves ordinary men the minimum of freedom to regulate their lives according to the inner light. This was clearly perceived by Hsün-Tze, who was apparently the first to crystallize the Confucian ideal into a coherent philosophy. On the thesis that 'the nature of man is evil; his goodness is only acquired training', he bases a systematic defence of that element in human life that seems most completely conventional—those decorous refinements of our brute nature that can blossom only in a highly civilized society. His cardinal virtue is 'propriety' (*li*), the meticulous observance of a code of etiquette that invests the most trivial detail of deportment with the formal significance of a sacred rite. All human institutions—social, political, religious—have the same justification: they are aids to the transformation of humanity from its native ugliness to a thing of beauty under the guidance of this principle. But *li* is no arbitrary convention: it symbolizes, and harmonizes with, the laws of nature. The ceremonious dance of the stars is guided by the strictest rules of propriety. Therefore 'in the world there are not two ways'. And Hsün-Tze has scant sympathy with those who stray from the beaten *tao* of the Confucian scholar into the trackless jungle of human passions, even though they stray in a vain quest for beauty or truth or God.<sup>1</sup>

'Water and fire have essences but not life; herbs and trees have life but no knowledge; birds and beasts have knowledge but no sense of right. Man is not as strong as a bull or as fleet as a horse; yet the bull and the horse are used by him. How is that? Man alone has a sense of right. By harmonizing rights through social distinctions and by observing the rules of propriety (*li*) men become united and therefore strong. Hence they can dwell in houses and palaces, order their actions according to the four seasons and control

<sup>1</sup>The following passages are condensed from the translation by H. H. Dubs (*The Works of Hsün-tze*).

all things. Hence they can enjoy the goodness of the whole world. (ix, p. 136.)

'Observance of *li* begins in accumulating rules; it is perfected in becoming beautiful and ends in producing joy. When it is perfected, men's emotions and sense of beauty are both fully expressed. . . . *Li* is that whereby the sun and moon are bright, the four seasons are ordered, the stars move in their courses, rivers flow, all things prosper, love and hate are tempered, joy and anger keep their proper place. It causes the lower orders to obey and the upper to be illustrious; through a myriad changes it prevents going astray. . . . He who is illustrious is so because he has completely observed the rules of *li*.

Every rite (*li*) according to rule,  
Every smile and word as it should be.

He who observes the rules of *li* considers wealth and things as the raw material of conduct; the division into noble and base as the adornment of society; the appropriate embellishment or simplification of conduct as all-important. . . . He cares sedulously for life and death. When man's beginning and his end are both beautiful, 'his *tao* is complete. The gentleman beautifies death at every turn, to lessen its ugliness; by moving it gradually further away throughout the period of mourning he continues to feel reverence; with the lapse of time he returns to the ordinary course of life, thereby to tranquillize life. For adornment and ugliness, music and weeping, peace of mind and sorrow are opposites; yet *li* unites them all, bringing each to the fore at the right time. Thus joy and grief are expressed in food by grain, wine, fish and pork, or by herbs, beans, water and broth; in clothing by caps, crowns, broiery and silk or by sackcloth and straw sandals; in dwellings by large mansions, raised beds and fine rush mats or by thatched roofs, lean-to huts, firewood for a chair and clods for a pillow. . . . Joy may also be expressed in music. For man must needs be joyous; if joyous, he must needs express his feelings in sound and body them forth in movement. Music is the *tao* to which this embodiment must conform if it is not to be disorderly. . . . When music is performed in the ancestral temple, prince and minister, ruler and ruled, hear it together and cannot fail to be harmonious and reverent; when it is performed in the inner apartments, father and son, older and younger brothers, hear it together and cannot fail to be harmonious and affectionate; when it is performed before the elders of the village or clan, old and young hear it together and cannot fail to be harmonious and obedient. For music discriminates and unites in order to establish harmony; it compares and contrasts in order to beautify its measures; it leads everything in one *tao*, so that it controls all changes. But Micius attacks it. What is to be done now?' (xix, p. 223; xx, p. 247.)

In his attitude to religion, Hsün-Tze was even more sceptical and positivist than his Master:

'What is known about Heaven is that we see its phenomena have their regular sequences; what is known about Earth is that it meets the conditions of life and can bring forth; what is known about the four seasons is that they have a definite number and can be used to serve humanity. . . . The stars make their round; the sun and moon alternately shine; the four seasons come in succession; the *Yin* and *Yang* go through their great mutations; the wind and rain exert their influence; the ten thousand things by their germinating principle come into being and by their nourishing principle

grow to maturity. We do not see the causes of these occurrences, but we see their effects—this is what is meant by the influence of spirits. The results of all these changes are known but not their invisible source—this is what is meant by the work of Heaven. When the work of Heaven has been perfected, the human body is made ready and the human spirit is born: it embodies love, hate, joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure—the Heaven-sent emotions; the five Heaven-sent senses receive each their appropriate stimuli; they are controlled by the heart established in the central cavity as a Heaven-sent ruler. But the sage does not seek to know Heaven. . . . When stars fall or the sacred tree groans, this is due to a modification of Heaven and Earth, the mutation of *Yin* and *Yang*. We may marvel at these portents, but we ought not to fear them. What we ought to fear are human portents—injury to the grain by a bad plough, or the loss of the people's allegiance by a bad government. . . . When people save the sun or moon from being eaten [in an eclipse], or pray for rain in a drought, or make an important decision only after divination—this is not in order to bring about what they seek, but to gloss over the matter. Those who think it supernatural are unfortunate. . . . Those who say there are demons must make that judgement when they are suddenly startled or at a time when they are hesitant or confused. . . . The code of *li* serves both Heaven and Earth; it honours our ancestors and magnifies princes and teachers. Hence the Kings have Heaven for their ancestor. . . . It is proper that the great should have the great deities and the lowly the lowly deities.' (xvii, pp. 177, 175, 180; xxi, p. 275; xix, p. 220.)

For Hsün-Tze, the mark of the good Confucian is an understanding of human nature.

'The gentleman,[or 'superior man'] does not excel in argument or investigation. In observing the high and low lands, assessing their fertility and allotting the five grains, he is not as good as a farmer. In estimating the quality and worth of goods, he is not as good as a merchant. In using compass, square and plumb-line or handling tools, he is not as good as an artisan. In indifference to right and wrong, true and false, and twisting each to modify the other so that both are shamed, he is not as good as certain disciples of Micius. But in fixing men's rank according to their virtue, in assigning office according to ability and in the conduct of affairs—there he will show his superiority.' (viii, p. 96.)

### *The Triumph of Force*

So there comes to our ears, faint and distorted but strangely apposite and insistent, an echo of some few of the many voices uplifted by the 'Hundred Schools' who competed for a hearing above the din of the 'Warring States'. For all their differences, it is evident that they drew upon and enriched a common stock of ideas. These ideas were diffused mainly by oral teaching in the schools which turned out recruits for the various public offices requiring an initiation into the mysteries of writing. Outside this official class a reading 'public' scarcely existed, and it is doubtful whether even Micius contrived to put his message across to the common folk. But it is significant that throughout all those squabbling nations to which a tincture of Chinese culture had peretrated, in such influential positions as are commonly held elsewhere by 'scribes' trained in a narrow tradition of priestly or patriotic bigotry, there were men who had been taught to view the world as a harmonious whole in which the leading part ought to be played by an orderly human society. Yet the feudal war-lords and their unruly armies

dominated the scene in the 3rd Century as in the 6th. Mencius, echoing Confucius' despondency, could still exclaim:

'We search the times, and they are ripe. But Heaven does not yet wish for peace and order below heaven. . . . How should I not be unhappy?' (iv, 13.)

Amid the prevailing violence, there were some who ventured to hope that violence itself might be the road to order. Among the pupils of Hsün-Tze was one who drew very different conclusions from the dogma of man's natural depravity. Han Fei-Tze held that men could never be reformed by mere training in the niceties of 'propriety'; they needed the compulsion of law, enforced with ample sanctions by a despotic power. The Confucian scholars were vain dreamers; they did not earn their keep in a community whose need was rather for merchants and artisans and still more for peasants and soldiers. They were even more harmful than the Taoist idlers, who prided themselves on 'vague and mysterious sayings inimical to Law'.

'We cannot bring back Confucius or Mencius, any more than the ancient sage kings, to tell us who is right. . . . The wise man does not seek to reproduce the past or say that anything *ought to be* merely because it always *has been* <sup>1</sup> He bases his rules on a survey of things as they are. . . . The enlightened prince does not restrain men by holding out an ideal of righteousness; he coerces them by law. . . . He does not rely on their doing good to him; he ensures that they cannot do wrong. . . . When law is the standard, the first effects may be harsh but they lead to lasting benefit; when goodwill is the standard, men grasp secretly after their own enjoyment, and disaster ensues.' (Han Fei-Tze, quoted in O. Franke: *Geschichte des chinesischen Reiches* [1930], I, pp. 218-219.)

These teachings shocked the orthodox, but they found a welcome in one quarter: the young king Cheng of Ch'in invited the author to fill a high position in his state. Unfortunately his chief minister Li-Sze, a fellow pupil of Hsün-Tze, advocated an even more ruthless realism and put it into practice at the expense of this dangerous rival's life.

Ch'in (or Ts'in), in the mountainous country of the upper Hoang-Ho, had long been one of the most powerful but least civilized of the Chinese states. According to Hsün-Tze:

'The people of Ch'in follow their feelings and original nature, delight in haughtiness, and are remiss in observing the rules of propriety and right.' (xxiii, p. 311.)

As the first part of China to come in contact with more westerly nations, Ch'in gave its name in their languages to the whole Empire. Thanks to this contact, which was seldom peaceable, the armies of Ch'in had learnt from the nomadic Huns new methods of warfare, less gentlemanly but more efficient. Light cavalry, on the Hun model, took the place of war chariots; iron weapons ousted bronze. Like the Spartans or the Prussians, the Ch'in not only stiffened military discipline but extended it to civilian life. They had found their Bismarck in count Yang (called Shang Yang or Shang-Tze), who is credited with a set of very far-reaching social reforms (c. 350 B.C.). He repressed brigandage by dividing the population

<sup>1</sup> Chuang-Tze had already blamed Confucius for trying to apply to modern Lu the rules that had suited ancient Chou.



into groups of five families, collectively responsible (like the Mediaeval English 'tithings') for any breach of the peace. This necessitated what was perhaps the first census. He suppressed vagrancy by instituting passports for travellers and employing idlers on big public works of clearance and drainage. He fixed weights and measures. Most sweeping of all, he replaced the feudal estates by small holdings with peasant proprietors. A fixed land tax took the place of the tithe of produce. In a work that passes under his name, it is argued that every man should be completely at the mercy of his superior—and the less mercy the superior shows, the better for the state.

'From punishment springs power, from power strength, from strength respect, and from respect virtue.' (Franke: *op. cit.*, I, p. 217. Cf. p. 183.)

Though a new king not only 'dropped the pilot' but put him to death, Yang's work lived on. When this grimly militarized state, having crushed the barbarians within and near its borders, seriously entered the arena of Chinese politics, the advance of the 'ravaging beast' (as the other states called it) was a career of massacre rather than battle. Before the accession of Cheng (247 B.C.), the shadowy overlordship of the Chou Dynasty had been brought to an end. In 221 B.C. Cheng defeated his last rival, and proclaimed that a new dynasty had begun with himself as First Emperor (Shih Huang-Ti). If any state or group of states had been strong enough to dispute this claim, the history of China might have resembled that of Europe, and the Age of the Warring States have been prolonged indefinitely.

More fortunate than Caesar or Alexander, the First Emperor lived to consolidate his vast empire—a region embracing most of 'China Proper' and far more extensive than the dominions of the earlier dynasties. With a methodical haste rare in China (or indeed anywhere) he proceeded to organize his conquests on the lines that had worked so well in Ch'in. He swept away the whole fabric of feudalism and appointed administrators directly dependent on the central government. He had a network of high-roads built from end to end of the empire, 50 paces broad, edged with trees and raised above flood level; and he standardized the gauge of chariots so that the same wheel-ruts might serve for all. Almost free from superstition himself, he used the superstition of his countrymen to strengthen his authority: he imposed a state religion something like the Caesar-worship of the Roman Empire or the Hitler-worship of the Third Reich. In every department he imposed law and order with an iron hand. He extended the frontiers of China on every side. His workmen strengthened the Great Wall (eventually 1,500 miles long and 20-30 feet high) as a barrier against the northern nomads. In everything he worked for unification in the teeth of a local patriotism that embarrassed him even in the ranks of his most devoted followers. A petition that all foreigners should be dismissed from the court called forth this successful protest from Li-Sze, who was not a native of Ch'in:

'May it please your Majesty. The present scheme is in every way a fatal step. Have we not innumerable examples in the past of the employment of foreigners to the greater glory of the State and the infinite advantage of the people? Bright pearls, good blades, fine horses—of such rarities not one is produced at home, yet your Majesty delights in all. We have even rejected our local music—shrill songs shrieked to carthen and wooden accompaniments—in favour of the magnificent harmonies of other States, simply because these contributed most to the pleasure of sense. In the choice of men, however, this principle is not to prevail. There is to be no question of capacity or incapacity, honesty or dishonesty. If he be not a native, out he must go. Surely this is to measure men by a lower standard

than music and gems! No method this for stretching the rod of empire over all within the boundary of the sea. For the foreigners who suffer expulsion will go to swell the hostile ranks. There will be but hollowness within and bitterness without; and danger will never cease to menace the State.' (Giles: *Gems*, pp. 52-54 [condensed].)

Others, while sharing the Emperor's desire for unity, had no sympathy with his uncompromising and revolutionary methods. Several Chinese emperors have been fairly good poets; many have been excellent critics; but few have been looked to for constructive statesmanship. Yet, curiously enough, it is for literary criticism of a somewhat sweeping kind that the great statesman emperor is chiefly remembered. Finding his drastic reforms condemned by the scholars (especially the Confucians) as contrary to the precedents of the Three Dynasties, he decided, on the advice of Li-Sze, to make a clean break with the past. In 212 B.C. he decreed the total destruction of all historical documents and books except the records of Ch'in and 'books of some use on medicine, divination or agriculture'—he was not prepared to carry his breach with tradition to such lengths as Han Fei-Tze, who had openly derided divination, prayer and sacrifice. It was made a capital offence to quote an ancient text in disparagement of the present. All teaching of the theory of government was forbidden: candidates for public office in this totalitarian state were to learn their art only from actual officials. The Emperor was to be the sole judge of right and wrong, subject to no external standard of criticism.

Tradition has doubtless exaggerated this burning of the books. If the only books then in use were bundles of engraved bamboo canes, they must have been easy to destroy and hard to hide and cannot have been very plentiful. It is probable, however, that some were already painted with a brush on palm leaves or silk<sup>1</sup>—an invention attributed to Li-Sze himself. Li-Sze is also credited with devising the unified and (relatively) simplified script of the Ch'in empire—the basis of modern Chinese writing.

### *Confucian Compromise*

It was of course clear to the outraged scholars that the first emperor, for all his genius and success, lacked the 'virtue' requisite to found a new dynasty. Rightly or wrongly, tradition has 'daubed his visage with the soot of Hell'. His ruthless vigour may have been what the country needed; but he failed to see that the despised scholars had created in the world of ideas the unity that he wished to translate into fact (though some of his inscriptions show that he realized the propaganda value of appeals to moral ideals). In the words of Sze-Ma Ch'ien:

'If he who conquers and annexes puts fraud and violence in the forefront, he who would pacify and strengthen must value mildness and equity. The same methods do not avail for winning and for keeping.' (Chap. vi. Chavannes' version, II, 232.)

On the Emperor's death in 210 B.C. and the accession of a typical conqueror's son—weak and tyrannical—the Warring States re-emerged. For some years (as after Alexander's death) the power lay in the hands of filibustering adventurers. But the desire for unity was too strong. In 202 B.C. the luckiest of the war-lords, Liu-Pang, founded the Han Dynasty, which lasted 400 years, roughly contemporaneous with the great age of Roman supremacy in Europe. Though the Han period produced no such rulers or thinkers as had ennobled the stormy annals

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Micius xvi (quoted above, p. 127). A few fragments of bone with painted characters have been found at An-Yang. Paper came into use from the 2nd Century B.C. and printing possibly from as early as the 6th Century A.D.

of the later Chou, it was in some ways the Golden Age of Chinese civilization. For government, literature and manners it was accepted as a model in the brilliant eras of Sung, T'ang and Ming. The brief spell of Ch'in rule had done its work. Henceforth China was culturally and (apart from transient interludes) politically unified. The second Han emperor revoked the decree against the books and the scholars. Secreted copies of old texts were brought to light; others were restored from the memory or imagination of the learned. The emperor recognized in these conservative and authoritarian teachings the surest prop of his power. 'Confucianism' as a theory of government was tried out in practice. The strictest 'propriety' in the relations of ruler and ruled was observed—or at any rate professed. There were no more breathtaking innovations. Even a shadow of the old feudal nobility was reinstated for a time, but henceforth the real power lay with a new nobility of scholarly administrators (*mandarins*) recruited by competitive examination in the Confucian classics.

As the Micicans are reminiscent of the Puritans, and the Taoists (at their best) of the Quakers, the Confucians, with their emphasis on authority and tradition, their appreciation of the emotional and social value of ceremonial splendour, their commonsense psychology and their genius for satisfying the most varied needs within one elastic system, present a Chinese counterpart to the Church of Rome. With amazing powers of conservation they have maintained the structure of Chinese society and thought down to the present century—for over 2,000 years. They have provided safety valves for the explosive element in human nature. The evils that they could not eradicate, they contrived (in Hsün-Tze's words) to 'gloss over'. They accepted the inequalities and 'discriminations' abhorred by Micus as an integral part of the universe. Intolerant at times, they more often stifled heresies by a condescending tolerance—which they extended also to injustices and absurdities. With human goodness and human wickedness, human wisdom and human folly, they somehow made terms. They failed to take to heart the Taoist tale of the wheelwright, who demonstrated that even his simple art could not be imparted by book-learning alone.

Confucian China never realized the dreams of Confucius and Mencius. Officials were unenterprising and often grossly corrupt or lazy and negligent. Ignorance and superstition were rank. The gulf between 'mind-workers and body-workers' and that between men and women continued to yawn. Periods of famine, brigandage, anarchy and civil war recurred time and again. But, when all is said, the Chinese empire ensured for many millions of men, over stretches of centuries at a time, the blessings of law and order. The arts and crafts flourished. Poets beheld the beauty of the world and transmitted something of their vision to others. Freedom of thought and worship was enjoyed at least within wider limits than in most times and places. Society manners were excellent. Drunken orgies gave place to elegant literary tea-parties. For the peasant the quiet rhythm of the seasons, the changeless alternation of *yin* and *yang*, was still the dominant fact of existence. The mandarin at the worst was generally a less oppressive master than the war-lord. At the best he was a conscientious administrator, inspired by an exacting creed to live laborious days in a spirit of patience, courtesy and condescension. To the privileged few, China offered the delights of a mellow culture which, we may confidently hope, will weather the barbarian storm of the 20th Century as it has weathered other storms in the past.<sup>1</sup> China (says a proverb) is like the sea: though every river on earth flows into it, it salts them all.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the recent remark of a Chinese statesman: "In the history of China, this will be known as 'the Unhappy Millennium'."

## X

## THE SECOND SURVEY CONTINUED: THE NEAR EAST

*The Melting-pot*

WHILE Hindus and Chinese were working out in relative isolation their distinctive conceptions of human life, the jumbled peoples of the Nearer East were adding new bricks to the fabric of our Western civilization. Like the clay-built cities of Mesopotamia, it is the product of constant erosion and renewal at a higher level—but not yet out of reach of the floods.

If we were to visit Babylon or Saïs (the new capital of Egypt) about the middle of the 6th Century B.C., we should find that, to outward seeming, there had been surprisingly little change during the preceding fourteen centuries—a no less lapse of time than sunders modern England from the barbarian settlements in the Roman province of Britain. In either city we should find priests worshipping the same old gods with the same old rites in temples closely modelled on the old ones; singing the same old hymns and copying out the same old cuneiform or hieroglyphic texts. Though we should notice evidence of a certain fusion between the two civilizations, yet in language, laws and customs, in the fashion of building, dressing and eating, in the details of daily life and doubtless also in the habits of thought, either country had preserved much that was distinctively and traditionally its own. But on closer observation we should probably become aware not only of countless novelties in detail (*e.g.* the prevalence of horse-drawn chariots and of iron tools and weapons) but of a fundamental change of atmosphere, thinly masked by an artificial conservatism. The art and organization of Saïte Egypt, the style of the buildings, the titles of the officials, were deliberately modelled on those of the Pyramid Age more than 2,000 years before. Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, was an enthusiastic antiquary and restorer of ancient temples and cults. Egypt and Babylon were no longer pioneers; both were living with ghosts—clinging vainly to the dead past in a world that had moved ahead of them. Towns had grown bigger, and a middle class of town-dwellers had become more prominent—a cosmopolitan class of professional and business men, skilled artisans, adventurers of all kinds, not rooted in the soil of any land. Let us stand at a street corner and watch the crowd.

Here comes a caravan of Syrian traders, whose weights and measures, like their Aramaic speech and writing, have an international currency. Here comes a bronze-clad soldier of fortune from the Isles of Greece, glancing to right and left with the bold inquisitive stare of the European. He might be Alcaeus' brother-in-law, who served in the bodyguard of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and defeated a giant in single combat, or that 'Archon son of Amoibichos' who fought for the contemporary Pharaoh and cut his name, tourist fashion, on a colossal statue of Ramses II with the aid (as the inscription explains) of 'Axe son of Nobody'. We can hear him singing some jaunty song like that of Hybrias:<sup>1</sup>

Great riches have I in my spear and claymore  
And the stout shield that shelters my body before;  
For these are my ploughshare, my sickle to reap  
And my winepress to crush the sweet juice of the grape,  
And a lord among vassals am I.

And the cowards who dare not bear spear and claymore  
And the stout shield that shelters the body before  
Lout down to the ground as I pass, one and all,  
In humble submission and 'Master' me call,  
And 'Monarch of Monarchs most high'.

<sup>1</sup> Actually 5th Century B.C.; but the sentiments appear two centuries earlier in Archilochus (*cf.* below, p. 187).

Here, with loose rein and bloody spur, comes a royal courier—gone before we can take stock of him. And here, wrapt in his own thoughts, comes that very modern figure, the Jewish exile. In the name of Marduk or Osiris, let us give him a curse, just for luck! Perhaps he too is cursing under his breath, muttering that he sees 'a seething pot, and the face thereof is toward the north, and out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land'; that the papyrus reed, the emblem of Egypt, is but 'a bruised reed, on which if a man lean it will go into his hand, and pierce it'; or that on the palace walls of Babylon is written in characters of fire 'MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN—God hath *numbered* thy kingdom, and brought it to an end; thou art *weighed* in the balances, and art found wanting; thy kingdom is *divided*, and given to the Medes and Persians.' Before the century was out, the north had boiled over, and the ancient civilizations of Nile and Euphrates were beginning to lose their sharp outlines in the melting-pot of the Persian Empire.

It would be misleading to speak as though the old empires had vanished and a new one had mysteriously taken their place. Rather, a 'Mesopotamian Empire', which had been expanding intermittently for over 2,000 years, had now come under the vigorous rule of Cyrus the Persian, who was as truly the heir to Sargon of Agadé and Hammurabi and the Assyrian conquerors as was the Ch'in Emperor to the sage kings of the Three Dynasties. In China an over-simplified literary tradition disguises the multiplicity of local cultures that were eventually fused in one Empire. Our knowledge of the antecedents of the Persian Empire is more accurate in many details, but woefully full of gaps. We can plot the position of individual trees, but we cannot see the wood. Archaeological finds and inscriptions from scattered sites attest the mutability and local diversity of fashions and the short-lived triumphs of petty kingdoms; but there has been no continuous literary tradition to gather up the loose threads into a pattern. We know the names of numerous kings and queens as well as countless humbler folk, but very few of them stand out as living personalities. Whole nations emerge from darkness, march across the stage and vanish as mysteriously as they appeared. If we can fix the when and where of events, we are generally far from knowing the reason why. The scribes of Ramses or his Hittite rival, who describe in glowing language the triumphant campaigns of their royal masters, are satisfied with the assurance that 'it was a famous victory', without tackling the delicate question of 'what they fought each other for'. There is little clue in this jumble of disconnected facts and suppositions to the interplay of developing material needs and social ideals that gives a meaning to the drama. There is no Confucius to express that yearning for order and unity that made most men submissive cogs in an ever-growing machine; no Lao-Tze to voice the discontent of those who wanted to stand aside. The whole process is much less self-conscious and articulate. No doubt, too, the Persian Empire was really more loosely knit geographically and blent of more varied ingredients than the Chinese, even apart from peoples (Indian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek) that it partly subdued but never assimilated. Yet it is possible, at some risk of over-simplification, to visualize its growth as a continuous process—an alternation of expansion and collapse, *yang* and *yin*, or (as the Persians themselves later expressed it) 'sheep time' and 'wolf time'.

In the fourteen centuries that separate our First and Second Surveys we may distinguish three main periods of collapse or upheaval, culminating respectively c. 1800, c. 1200 and c. 600 B.C., followed respectively by the expansion of the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Persian Empire.<sup>1</sup> It is easy, but not very illuminating, to explain these rhythmic fluctuations, by analogy with the life of animal

<sup>1</sup> This apparent cycle of 600 years is discussed in A. J. Toynbee's *Study of History* [1934] III A, Annex II.

or vegetable organisms, as life-cycles in the growth of empires or civilizations. It is a more convincing theory, though not yet proved, that they are the effects of climatic cycles, which might act in various ways—by enlarging or diminishing the cultivable area, by compelling nomads to seek new homes, by promoting outbreaks of epidemic diseases such as bubonic plague or the slower but surer devastation caused by endemic diseases such as malaria. But, without excluding these and other unknown factors, it is possible to find at least a partial explanation in what we know of the economic and social structure of the ancient empires.

### *The Balloon of Empire*

Put yourself in the position of one of these great Oriental monarchs. The palatial apartments and ceremonial robes, the honorific titles and the kowtowing, all these are very necessary symbols of the divinity that doth hedge a king. But it is kingship that is sacred—not the individual tenant of the office. Your personal tenure rests on the loyalty and efficiency of your army. To maintain your army you require a no less loyal and efficient organization for collecting taxes, chiefly in the form of grain. If you are an enlightened monarch, you will realize that it is to your interest to have a large, prosperous and orderly subject population to tax. You will strive to protect them from the depredations of barbarian raiders or your own officials; to encourage the making of roads, irrigation ditches and other public works; and to perform satisfactorily your religious duties as mediator between the nation and the national gods. Up to a point you will probably be obeyed even if you do none of these things. But you will always have to keep an eye open for possible rivals, especially successful military commanders, intriguing priests and members of your own family. Your two chief problems, though you may not be fully conscious of them, are the same that confront a modern dictator—a lack of the raw materials needed to make the country self-supporting, and a surplus of man-power not fully absorbed by the economic machine, especially restless young men in whom the instincts of their hunting ancestors crave something more exciting than the monotonous toil of the fields. Both these birds can be killed with one stone.

Both Egypt and Mesopotamia lack even such essentials as metals and timber. These are obtainable in neighbouring barbarian countries by legitimate trade, in return for grain or manufactured goods. But the barbarians may not be sound business men: they may refuse to trade, or may exact heavy tolls from merchants or even plunder and enslave them. Punitive expeditions become necessary to teach these stupid tribesmen a lesson; if the enemy is rich and weak enough, such expeditions can be made to pay their way. Once a tribe is thoroughly cowed, it can be forced to render a regular tribute and accept a permanent garrison of troops and a colony of traders, miners and other exploiters. Gradually it may develop industries of its own and needs that can be supplied only by further exploration and expansion. So, almost unconsciously, you find your empire growing. There is a temptation to keep up the efficiency of your troops by continual exercise. So long as you are successful, you will be praised for doing so; you will provide a congenial employment for disgruntled younger sons and other landless adventurers, and will strengthen the patriotic spirit of the masses. So, if you have a taste for adventure or power or 'glory', you will hasten the process of expansion by extensive campaigns. You will bring under your sway large areas with hostile, resentful populations in which only a minority is bound to the empire by ties of interest or traditional loyalty. The stronger your empire appears, the weaker it may actually be. Moreover, in the long run, long campaigns do not really pay: if you levy a citizen army, you are keeping men away from their work and gradually killing off the most vigorous stock of the nation; if you rely on mercenaries, they soon become your masters, and you must exact ever higher

taxes to satisfy their growing demands. But a policy of peace is not necessarily safer: it will probably result in steady encroachments on the home country by the growing power of the provinces or by some rival monarch less peaceably inclined. So it is that an ancient empire (and perhaps modern empires are not very different) was like a balloon: if it was left alone, it shrank and crumpled; if it expanded too far or too fast, it burst with a bang. Hence follows that almost rhythmic fluctuation of expansion and collapse, interspersed with periods of inertia.

While the settled communities were growing, the barbarians of desert or mountain were not passive recipients of higher civilization. We may find them drifting peacefully one by one or in small bands into the cultivated zone in search of a job—helping with the harvest, looking after horses, peddling goods from door to door, learning a handicraft, marrying the boss's daughter—gradually becoming absorbed, but at the same time changing the character of the native population. Often the barbarians combine in larger companies to raid the settled country, burning and slaying and driving off beasts and of course also women, who naturally change the character of their captors' population. Occasionally an army of nomads under a gifted leader may overrun a civilized kingdom, destroying the ancient social system and imposing themselves as a warlike aristocracy. But sooner or later, by adaptation or intermarriage, they tend to merge in the native population, and old customs and characters rise again to the surface.

Since population normally tends to increase beyond the means of subsistence, peasant and nomad both experience land hunger and are ready, if opportunity serves, to move their neighbour's landmarks or dispossess him of his pastures or hunting-grounds. Sometimes whole tribes or nations are driven by dearth or oppression or sheer *Wanderlust* to seek a new home. Such were the South African *voortrekkers* 100 years ago, or the migrating Germans defeated by Julius Caesar—hordes of fighting men accompanied by their women and children in wagons. Such too were the Peoples of the Sea who descended upon Egypt about 1200 B.C.—‘a great multitude fighting daily to fill their bellies’, as the scribe says. Their settlement in Canaan (where they became known as the Philistines) must have wrought a bigger change than any influx of raiders unaccompanied by women. Other displacements of whole nations, by land or sea, have been carefully planned colonizations. Others have been due to the wholesale transplantation of disaffected subjects from one part of an empire to another, as Jews were exiled to ‘the waters of Babylon’.

A great part of man's story is made up of ‘movements’ in the most literal sense—tramping armies; trudging refugees, carrying their pots and pans, their children and their household gods; galloping bands of night-riders, with a screaming woman flung over the saddle-bow, strings of pack-horses or camels; adventurous sea-rovers with one eye open for an honest bargain and the other for an easy prize; wandering tinkers and pedlars, minstrels and story-tellers. Such, against the established background of fields and villages and occasional towns, are some of those incalculable factors at which the historian can only hint in vague phrases like ‘imperial expansion’, ‘cultural diffusion’ or ‘waves of population’. As for the other ‘movements’ that determine the fluctuating course of history—the tides and cross-currents and eddies in human thought—these too must originate in the experiences of individuals, laborious efforts of mental readjustment or sudden flashes of ‘inspiration’; but their origins remain for the most part beyond our ken.

The fluctuation that appears in the course of events themselves is even more marked in our knowledge of those events. During a period of expansion, when we are dealing with a prosperous and orderly empire, we can usually follow their course with some confidence. Triumphal inscriptions commemorate the exploits

of the ruler; contract tablets or papyri record the humbler ventures of the trader; the architect and the potter are busy piling up unwritten documents for the archaeologist. Then comes the crash, followed by an illiterate uncreative age, whose bewildering ups-and-downs we can often only conjecture. When law and order return, the familiar landmarks have gone. Names, institutions and ideas have changed. And it is hard to realize that the thread of historical continuity, which in our records seems irreparably snapped, was in fact unbroken.

### *The Drive Towards Unity*

The alternation of expansion and upheaval, however we may explain it, was something more than the oscillation of a pendulum. Like the push and recoil of a piston, it was the instrument of a driving force tending almost continuously in one direction. During the upheavals, immigrants from widely sundered regions found themselves settling down in neighbouring communities, or even in the same community. The reverse process of imperial expansion brought separate communities into a single political and economic system, in which the various conquered peoples soon became familiar with the language, laws and religion of the conquerors. Both processes, therefore, tended towards racial intermixture and cultural diffusion—in a word, towards unification. A brief historical summary will make this clear.

During the *First Upheaval* (c. 1800 B.C.) Aryan nomads from the northern grasslands appeared on the outskirts of the older civilizations—probably in the Punjab, certainly in Iran and on the upper Euphrates, where the Mitanni in the 14th Century were worshipping Indra, Mitra, Varuna and other Vedic gods. At the same time a semi-Aryan language of more western affinities was introduced into Asia Minor by the Hatti or Hittites. These northerners achieved some spectacular successes, possibly aided by a monopoly of horse-power. A Hittite army sacked Babylon in a smash-and-grab raid; and another band of adventurers (whose rulers were known as the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings) overran Egypt with an ease which afterwards puzzled the native historian Manetho.

'At this time, I know not how, God was set against us, and there came out of the East men of undistinguished race who, venturing boldly against the country, took it easily without a blow. Having subdued the former rulers, they ruthlessly sacked the cities, threw down the temples and treated all the inhabitants as foes, slaying some and of others also enslaving the wives and children. Finally they chose one of their number, whose name was Salatis, to be king. He lived at Memphis, exacting tribute from Upper and Lower Egypt and posting garrisons at vantage points. In particular he guarded the eastern frontier, foreseeing that the growing power of the Assyrians would one day be tempted to invade the same kingdom. Finding . . . a suitable city called (from some old religious association) Avaris, he fortified it with walls and garrisoned it with 240,000 (!) fully armed men. Thither he would go in summer to gather grain dues, pay his troops and exercise them under arms so as to overawe outsiders.' (Manetho, in Josephus *Against Apion*, i, 14.)

The two ancient centres of civilization quickly reasserted themselves, armed with the new weapons and something also of the militant spirit of the invaders. For some three centuries (c. 1500–1200 B.C.) the Egyptians maintained a precarious hold over Canaan. The royal scribes have preserved vivid accounts of their Asiatic campaigns, notably of one (c. 1295 B.C.) in which the armies of Ramses II marched through the narrow defiles of Canaan 'as though they were upon the roadways of Egypt', when they were suddenly attacked by 'the wretched chief



of Hatti', who had lain in ambush near Kadesh. The battle (if we are to believe the chronicler) was retrieved by the young Pharaoh in single combat against 2,500 chariots of the Hittites! At any rate, he was so well satisfied with his triumph that he returned to Egypt to win a more peaceful reputation as 'Ozymandias king of kings', builder of innumerable 'follies' in stone which were almost as costly as conquests and much more durable. The realities of campaigning in Canaan emerge more clearly from a letter written by an officer on frontier duty, who grumbles that he has to make bricks without straw, he spends his days gazing up at the sky or along the road, he is plagued by gnats and savage dogs, and his pal has toothache. An autobiography written by one of Ramses' scribes, evidently in a heroic style worthy of his royal master, provoked a brother scribe to write a parody, which includes some very lifelike episodes:

'Behold, there is the narrow defile, made perilous by Bedouins, who are hidden in the bushes; some of them are four or five cubits from nose to sole, fierce of face, their heart not mild, and they hearken not to coaxing. Thou art alone, no helper is with thee and no army is behind thee. Thy path is full of boulders and shingle and overgrown with thorns. The 'hand' (?) of the chariot falleth, and the thong breaketh (?). Thou unharnessest the horse in the middle of the defile in order to repair the 'hand'. Thou art not expert in the way of binding it, and knowest not how to fasten it together. Thou art sick at heart, and thou startest to go on foot, with thy horse heavily loaded. There is not a cloud in the sky, and thou fauciest that the enemy is behind thee. Trembling taketh hold of thee. Oh for a hedge, that thou mightest put it upon the other side! Thy horse is galled up to the time that thou findest quarters for the night. Thou perceivest how pain tasteth.

'When thou enterest Joppa [Jaffa], thou findest the meadow growing green in its season. Thou forcest a way into a vineyard and findest the fair maiden that keepeth watch over the vines. She taketh thee to herself as a companion and giveth thee the colour of her bosom. Thou art recognized, and forced to bear witness [against thyself]; the hero is put on trial, and must sell his tunic of good Upper Egyptian linen and sleep every night with a piece of flannel about him. While thou slumberest, thy bow, thy knife and thy quiver are stolen; thy reins are cut in the dark and thine horse is away. Thou beggest "Give food and water, for I have arrived safely." But they turn a deaf ear and pay no heed to thy tales.' (From *The Teaching of Amenemope*, in Erman & Blackman: *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, pp. 231-2 [condensed].)

Canaan was a meeting-place not only of armies but of cultures. Canaanite princes wrote to their Egyptian overlord in Babylonian cuneiform, which had become the earliest known example of an international diplomatic language. In this medium the Pharaohs conducted endless negotiations and intrigues with the new powers of Hatti and Mitanni, with Babylon itself and with the rising empire of Assyria (which the Babylonians persisted in regarding as a rebellious province). The Babylonian king writes to Pharaoh:

'Now as to the Assyrians my subjects, have I not written to you concerning them? Why then have they come to your land? If you love me, let them have no success; let them accomplish nothing at all. As a present for you I have sent three minas of lapis lazuli and five span of horses for five chariots.'

A Hittite king writes to the ruler of a minor principality on the Euphrates with the object of imposing 'economic sanctions':

'Since the king of Assyria is my enemy, let him be your enemy. Do not let your traders go to Ashur nor the traders from thence come to your country nor even pass by it.'

A ruler of Cyprus (?) writes to ask for the hand of a Hittite princess in marriage. The queen Putuhepa in reply hints broadly that he has an inflated notion of his own importance ('If it were not for the sea, my brother would not exist at all') and that his estimate of an appropriate dowry is preposterous. She winds up with the (presumably ironic) question: 'What daughter of Heaven or Earth shall I give to my brother? Shall I wed him to a princess of Babylon or Assyria?' If Putuhepa was a fair sample, it is hardly surprising that it was in Hittite country that Greek legend placed the Amazons. Though this particular diplomatic marriage apparently did not come off, the practice in general was quite normal, so that already we find royal families more closely allied in blood to their rivals than to their own subjects.

About 1200 B.C. the balance of power was upset by a *Second Upheaval*. In Asia Minor the Hittites were replaced as the dominant power by the Phrygians, an Aryan people who are reputed to have crossed the Hellespont (Dardanelles) from Thrace shortly before the siege of Troy. During the siege they figure as kinsmen and allies of the Trojans—though curiously enough the Greek leader Agamemnon is said to be a grandson of Pelops the Phrygian. This was only part of an extensive migratory movement, to which we may attribute the break-up of the Minoan civilization (the palace of Knossos was destroyed probably c. 1400 B.C.) and the occupation of the southern coastlands of Canaan by the Philistines, who seem to have been a mixed company of fugitives from Crete and the Hittite Empire. It is likely that some of these homeless 'Peoples of the Sea' also helped to swell the population of the Phoenician cities further up the coast—Byblos, Arvad, Sidon, Tyre. We soon find the Phoenicians profiting by the decline of Minoan sea-power to monopolize the sea-borne commerce of the Mediterranean and plant their trading settlements far and wide round its shores. In Homer's day (c. 800 B.C.?) the 'skilful Sidonians' were proverbial.<sup>1</sup> Later the primacy passed to Tyre, 'richer in fish than in sand', 'the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth'. The Tyrian colony of Carthage, traditionally founded c. 800 B.C. by the fugitive queen Elissa (Dido), soon grew to be the greatest power in the western Mediterranean. The belief that Phoenician ships sailed as far as Cornwall in search of tin, however probable, rests on little direct evidence. We may also question Herodotus' remarkable tale of the Phoenicians who circumnavigated Africa from east to west by order of Pharaoh Necho. But we possess the authentic log of the voyage made by the Carthaginian Hanno with 60 fifty-oared galleys and 30,000 (?) men and women whom he dumped as colonists at various sites on the Atlantic coast of Africa.

A lively picture of Phoenician commerce is presented by a Hebrew writer, who compares the city of Tyre to one of her own galleys:

'Thy borders are in the heart of the seas, thy builders have perfected thy beauty. They have made all thy planks of fir trees from Senir: they have taken cedars from Lebanon to make a mast for thee. Of the oaks of Bashan have they made thine oars; they have made thy benches of ivory inlaid in boxwood, from the isles of Kittim [Citium in Cyprus]. Of fine linen with brodered work from Egypt was thy sail, that it might be to thee for an

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Strabo xvi. 2 (24): 'The Sidonians are skilled in many arts, as the Poet says. Moreover, they are experts in astronomy and arithmetic from their experience in casting accounts and sailing at night.'



XIII

[British Museum Photograph]  
ASHUR-NAZIR-PAL II



[Berlin Museum]

ASSYRIAN CAMP SCENE



*Photograph by M. N. Lubin*

ZOROASTRIAN TOWER OF SILENCE NEAR TEHRAN



*(Photographs by M. N. Lubin)*

SOLDIERS AND TRIBUTARIES OF THE  
GREAT KING

ensign; blue and purple from the isles of Elishah was thine awning. The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were thy rowers: thy wise men, O Tyre, were in thee, they were thy pilots. The ancients of Gebal [Byblos] and the wise men thereof were in thee thy calkers: all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in thee to occupy thy merchandise. Persia and Iud [Lydia] were in thine army, thy men of war: they hanged the shield and helmet in thee; they set forth thy comeliness. . . . Tarshish [Tartessus in Spain?] was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded for thy wares. Javan [Ionian Greeks], Tubal, and Meshech [Phrygians], they were thy traffickers; they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass for thy merchandise. . . . Judah and Israel traded for thy merchandise wheat, and honey, and oil, and balm. Damascus was thy merchant for the multitude of thy handiworks; with the wine of Helbon, and white wool. . . . Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were thy merchants in lambs, and rams, and goats. The traffickers of Sheba [south-west Arabia] traded for thy wares with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones and gold. . . .

'Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters: the east wind hath broken thee in the heart of the seas. . . . The merchants among the peoples hiss at thee; thou art become a terror [*i.e.* a warning], and thou shalt never be any more.' (*Ezekiel xxvii.*)

Ezekiel is speaking of the capture of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, who came like an 'east wind' out of Babylon. The prophecy of final destruction, however, was not immediately fulfilled.

The Phoenicians have played an important role in history as adapters and diffusers of civilization, notably in the development and spread of the alphabet, and as pioneers of a new type of social order in which small, highly specialized communities maintained an independent existence at the centre of wide circles of economic activity. Some Phoenician cities were apparently the first communities to reckon dates continuously from a fixed era, instead of by the years of individual kings or magistrates. Their craftsmanship was good but uninspired—they made combs or vases with an eye to the market, not for art's sake. They have left practically no written expression of their thoughts. But their commercial and colonial ventures witness to a spirit of enterprise tempered by shrewdness. It would be interesting to know more of these 'merchant princes', resplendent in purple and gold, who steered their cities as craftily through the turmoil of clashing empires as they steered their galleys through Mediterranean squalls and Atlantic gales.

What the Phoenicians were at sea, their kinsmen the Aramaeans of Syria were on land. Like their Israelite neighbours, these were the mixed offspring of Canaanite peasants and Bedouin nomads. Their cities were harbours where the 'ships of the desert' came to port from voyages over the sea of sand. They were also, like the Phoenician cities, centres of industry: the greatest of them, Damascus, early became famous for its *damask* cloths and *damascened* steel, besides its '*damascene*' or *damson* plums.<sup>1</sup> Some Aramaean caravans penetrated as far as India; others, we cannot say how early, took 'the Golden Road to Samarcand'. And, like the Phoenician galleys, they took the alphabet with them. But the Aramaeans had no such safe strongholds as Tyre on its rocky island, and they lacked the prudence to form a united nation in face of the new danger that threatened from the east.

The work of unification, in which these mercantile cities played a major part,

<sup>1</sup>Assyrian records (c. 800 B.C.) speak of orchards at Damascus and tribute paid thence in metals, inlay work and coloured garments.

was undertaken in a more drastic fashion by the Assyrians, the first people in history who pursued a deliberate policy of conquest on a big scale. Their annals are accurately dated and sometimes picturesque, but harp always on the same theme. Here is a sample, from the year 877 B.C.:

'I Ashur-Nazir-Pal, the exalted, the unsparing, the worshipper of the great gods [etc., etc.] . . . crossed the Euphrates in its flood in ships made of skins and drew nigh to Carchemish. . . . The chariots, the horsemen and the footmen of Carchemish I took with me. The kings of all the lands came unto me and embraced my feet. I took hostages from them. . . . I marched along the side of Mount Lebanon and went up to the Great Sea of the land of Amurru [i.e. the Amorites]. In the Great Sea I washed my weapons, and I made offerings unto the gods. The tribute of the kings of the sea-coast, of the people of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, . . . and Arvad, which lies in the midst of the sea—silver, gold, lead, copper, vessels of copper, garments of brightly coloured wool and of linen, maple-wood, boxwood and ivory and a "sea-horse" I received as tribute from them, and they embraced my feet. Into Mount Amanus I climbed up, and beams of cedar, cypress, juniper and pine I cut down. I made offerings unto the gods, and I fashioned a memorial of my valour and there I set it up.' (D. D. Luckenbill: *Historical Records of Assyria*, I, § 476, 479.)

Such was the fate of the submissive; the recalcitrant met with sterner measures.

'Unto the city of Uda I drew nigh. I stormed the city; with mines, siege engines and battering-rams I took the city; 1,400 of their fighting men I put to the sword, 580 men I captured alive, 3,000 prisoners I brought out. The living men I impaled on stakes round the city, of the others I put out the eyes. The rest of them I transported and brought to Assyria. The city I took for my possession.' (*Ibid.*, § 480.)

These terrorist tactics did not prevent continual revolts of the conquered. Nevertheless, in spite of frequent setbacks, successive Assyrian kings blew up the balloon of empire to perilous dimensions, culminating with Esar-Haddon's conquest of Egypt (671 B.C.) which for the first time united the civilizations of Nile and Euphrates under one ruler. He passed the explosive burden to Ashur-Bani-Pal.

Ashur-Bani-Pal figures in Greek legend as Sardanapalus, author of the epigram: 'Eat, drink and be merry; nothing else matters a rap.' His records reveal an able and (at first) highly successful ruler, whose varied interests are reflected in the remains of his splendid palaces and libraries, decorated with sculptures much livelier than previous products of the grim Assyrian style (which follows Hittite models). He writes thus of his own boyhood:

'Marduk, master of the gods, gave me a wide-open ear; Nabu, the universal scribe, gave me a grasp of his wisdom; Urta and Nergal endowed my body with strength and unrivalled power. I acquired the art of the master Adapa [an ancient 'culture hero', possibly a variant of *Adam*], the hidden treasure of all scribal knowledge, the signs of heaven and earth. I was brave, I was tireless, in the assembly of the artisans I received orders (?). I have wrestled with the heavens under the learned masters of oil divination; I have solved the laborious problems of division and multiplication, which were not clear; I have read the artistic script of Sumer and the dark Akkadian, which is hard to master, now taking pleasure in reading stones from before the Flood,

now angry because I was stupid and addled by the beautiful script (?). This is what was done all my days: I mounted my steed, I rode joyfully, I went up to the hunting lodge (?); I held the bow, I let fly the arrow, the sign of my valour; I hurled heavy lances like a javelin; holding the reins like a driver, I made the wheels go round; I learned to handle shields like a heavy-armed Bowman. I wished to be the great lord of all the craftsmen. At the same time I was learning royal decorum, walking in the kingly ways; I stood before the king my begetter, giving commands to the nobles. Without me no governor was appointed; no prefect was installed in my absence. . . .

'The great gods looked with favour upon my pious deeds, and at their exalted command I took my seat in gladness upon the throne of my father. The nobles and officials loved my exercising the kingly rule. At the proclamation of my honoured name the Four Regions rejoiced. The kings of the Upper and Lower Seas, slaves of my father, sent me tidings of their joy. The on-coming weapons of the enemy sank to the ground. . . . In the whole land no gentleman did any evil. One travelling by himself travelled the farthest road in safety. There was no thief, no shedder of blood. . . . The Four Regions were in perfect tranquillity, like the finest oil.' (*Ibid.*, II, § 986-987.)

But the storms of the *Third Upheaval* were blowing round the embattled walls of Nineveh, and in his latter days the old king was puzzled to know what the world was coming to.

'The rules for making offerings to the dead and libations to the ghosts of the kings my ancestors, which had not been practised, I reintroduced. I did well unto god and man, to dead and living. Why have sickness, ill-health, misery and misfortune befallen me? I cannot away with the strife in my country and the dissensions in my family. Disturbing scandals oppress me alway. Misery of mind and of flesh bow me down; with cries of woe I bring my days to an end. On the day of the city-god, the day of the festival, I am wretched; death is seizing hold on me and bears me down. With lamentation and mourning I wail day and night; I groan: "O god, grant even to one who is impious that he may see thy light! How long, O god, wilt thou deal thus with me? Even as one that hath not feared god and goddess am I reckoned." ' (Quoted in *Cambridge Ancient History*, III, p. 127.)

A few years after Ashur-Bani-Pal's death, with one of the loudest bangs in history, the balloon burst. In 612 B.C. Nineveh was sacked by Cyaxares the Mede in alliance with the rebellious Babylonians, despite the belated effort of the 'bruised reed' Necho of Egypt to save his old enemy—doubtless in the sacred name of the Balance of Power. A few years later Assyria had vanished from the map. The prophet Nahum sang her requiem.

'Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? . . . Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy worthies are at rest: thy people are scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather them. There is no assuaging of thy hurt; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee clap the hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?' (*Nahum*, iii, 7; 18-19.)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Greek epigrammatist (Phocylides) characteristically attributes the downfall not to wickedness but to folly:

A small city, rock-based, which wise ordinances bind,  
Is stronger than Nineveh out of its mind.

It is possible that this *Third Upheaval* was set going by one of the more vigorous Chou kings of China, whose campaign against the Huns may have started a general westerly movement among the nomads of the steppes. From c. 700 B.C. bands of Aryan horsemen (Cimmerians and Scythians) raided far and wide over Asia Minor and Syria, helping to break up the old order but making no permanent settlement. Herodotus says that:

'All the land was laid waste by their reckless violence; for, besides levying from each the tribute laid upon him, they rode about and robbed every man of what he possessed.' (I, 106.)

Jeremiah puts it more picturesquely:

'They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea, and they ride upon horses.' (*Jeremiah*, vi, 23.)

Meanwhile, throughout the high plateau of Iran, from the Indus to the Tigris, other Aryan immigrants had been mingling with the natives and building up organized states. Three tribes of these Iranians deserve special notice: the Bactrians in the east, with their centre at Bactra (now Balkh in Afghanistan); the Medes in the north-west, with their capital at Ecbatana (Hamadan); the Persians in the south-west, where they had adopted something of the ancient Elamite civilization. The Medes had been troublesome neighbours to the Assyrians for over two centuries before king Cyaxares overthrew Nineveh. Then about 550 B.C. the Median king was defeated by a rebellious subject, the Persian prince Cyrus, who made the Persians dominant in Iran. After adding all Asia Minor to his dominions, Cyrus defeated the scholarly Nabonidus of Babylon, who had been quietly chronicling these stirring events without realizing that he was to be the next victim. In 525 his son Cambyses conquered Egypt. The throne then passed to the head of a younger branch of the same *Achaemenid* family, Darius son of Hystaspes, during whose reign the Persian Empire reached its full extent, 'from India even unto Ethiopia', embracing also the European country of Thrace. The 'Warring States' had been united at last.

Though the Persian Empire (as noted above) represented in fact a continuation and extension of the military dominance of Mesopotamian civilization, it was marked by certain novelties. Darius could claim with some truth that he was 'one king of many, one lord of many, the great king, king of kings, king of the countries possessing all kinds of peoples, king of this great earth far and wide'; and this extent and diversity of his dominions presented new problems, which he tackled in a very business-like way. In the words of Herodotus:

'He established twenty provinces, which the Persians call *satrapies*, and apportioned among the various subject nations a regular annual tribute amounting in all to 14,560 Euboic talents [about £3,500,000 in gold] . . . Before his time there was no fixed tax, but they used to bring gifts. Therefore the Persians say that Darius was a shopkeeper, Cambyses a master [of slaves] and Cyrus a father.' (III, 89, 95.)

To facilitate commerce and taxation, he adopted from the conquered Lydians of Asia Minor the invention of coined money. He kept his provincial governors (*satraps*) as far as possible under control by mutual jealousy and by an organization of spies and inspectors. Centralized control was also facilitated by a network of highways, with post-houses at intervals for the royal couriers. Though the



satraps and other high officers and the crack troops were generally drawn from among the Iranian conquerors, no attempt was made to suppress other nationalities. Most of the land seems to have been held under a sort of feudal tenure, normally by native lords, not infrequently by priesthoods like that of Jerusalem. Trade remained largely in the hands of Aramaeans by land and Phoenicians by sea. The general policy was one of tolerance, which proved more successful than the Assyrian policy of blood and iron. The Persian Empire suffered much from internal strife, but (as in the Roman Empire) this was more often provoked by rival claimants to the throne than by the discontent of conquered nations.

### *The Idea of Universal Godhead*

While merchants, statesmen and soldiers had been working (for the most part blindly) for the unification of the Near East, the millions of human beings affected by this development were struggling no less blindly to adjust their minds to the changing world. This process found expression almost entirely in the language of religion.

It was comparatively easy to symbolize the unification of nations by identifying their national gods with one another or by linking their divine rulers, as well as their human ones, in ties of friendship or marriage. So the Egyptian scribe symbolized the victories of Ramses in Canaan by comparing him to the Canaanite *Ba'al* as well as to Egyptian war-gods. Ashur-Nazir-Pal regarded himself as enlarging the empire of 'the lord *Ashur*, who entrusted his merciless weapon unto my lordly power'. The Achaemenid kings expressed their more tolerant spirit correspondingly: in Babylon, Cyrus was 'the chosen of *Marduk*', who conciliated the priesthood by restoring the popular cult that had suffered from the ill-timed antiquarianism of Nabonidus; in Jerusalem, he was 'the shepherd of Jehovah', who subsidized the rebuilding of Solomon's Temple; in Egypt, Cambyses was Pharaoh *Re-Mesuti* ('Born of *Re*'), who made sacrifice to the Great Gods in Saïs.

Much more significant than these crude political devices was the serious attempt made by a few creative minds to rethink the whole problem of man's relation to his environment—to picture him no longer as a member of a particular national group with its own limited obligations but as an individual owing allegiance to the whole conceivable universe, personified as a universal God. This movement was a protest not only against nationalism (with its resultant wars and economic restrictions) but against all the cramping limitations imposed on the human spirit by the civilizing process. It can be most clearly traced, over a period of many centuries, in the sacred scriptures of Israel, which for this reason must be treated more fully in a separate chapter. The Israelites were a narrowly nationalistic people, who never quite outgrew the simple culture of the desert nomads. But in Canaan they were near the point of contact of all the Near Eastern civilizations; and there is reason to suppose that their religious beliefs were only a peculiarly intense expression of ideas which sprang from that contact over a much wider area. We know a little of two other religious movements which, though widely separated in space and time, appear to be related expressions of the same spiritual development.

#### (i) *Atenism*

The worship of the solar disk under the name of *Aten* was inaugurated in Egypt about 1400 B.C. by Pharaoh Amenhotep III. His mother was a princess of Mitanni,<sup>1</sup> a worshipper therefore of the Vedic nature gods; and it is reasonable to suppose that the new deity represented the Aryan sun or sky god, a relatively

<sup>1</sup> Her father bore the Aryan name *Artatama* ('Most Righteous'), formed from the word *arta* ('right'), afterwards a key-word of Mazdaism.

fresh and natural conception of divine power, free from the tangle of associations that had been woven round the solar cults of Egypt by many generations of priestcraft. The example of Re, with whom Aten was partly identified, had already shown the universal appeal of sun-worship and its power of overriding local cults; and Amenhotep may have hoped that the new religion would be a bond between his Egyptian and Asiatic subjects. To his son Amenhotep IV it meant something much more.

Amenhotep IV, better known by his assumed name of Akhenaten ('Aten is Satisfied'), is the first outstanding personality in history. Modern estimates of his character and purpose vary immensely. Was he a strikingly original thinker or a visionary and weak-minded prig? A far-sighted imperialist, a humanitarian pacifist, or an idle dilettante indifferent to the welfare of the people? It is at any rate clear that he deliberately challenged the age-old authority of the 'established church', in particular the all-powerful priests of Amon, whose vast lands he transferred to the new god—a stroke comparable with Henry VIII's confiscation of the monastery lands. But Akhenaten's Reformation was much the more sweeping of the two. In his brand-new capital Akhet-Aten (now Tell-el-Amarna), decorated with sculpture and painting whose graceful naturalism (possibly inspired by Minoan models) broke all the stiff conventions of Egyptian art, the young reformer tried to make a fresh start. A famous hymn, written on the wall of a tomb at Akhet-Aten, proclaims without disguise the latent monotheism which many of the initiate had already divined beneath the complex pageantry of Egyptian religion.

'Beautiful is thine appearing in the horizon of heaven, thou living sun, the first who lived! Thou art Re, and thy rays encompass the lands, and thou subduest them for thy dear son [*i.e.* the king].

'When thou goest down in the western horizon, the earth is in darkness, as if it were dead. They sleep in the chamber, their heads wrapped up, and no eye seeth the other. Every lion cometh forth from his den, and all worms that bite. When it is dawn and thou risest and shinest as the sun in the day, the Two Lands keep festival, awake, and stand on their feet, for thou hast raised them up. They wash their bodies, they take their garments, and their hands praise thine arising. The whole land doeth its work. All beasts are content with their pasture, the trees and herbs are verdant. The birds fly out of their nests and their wings praise thee. All wild beasts dance on their feet—they live when thou arisest for them. The ships voyage down and up stream likewise, and every way is open. The fishes in the river leap up before thy face. . . .

'The lands of Syria and Nubia, and the land of Egypt—thou puttest every man in his place and thou suppliest their needs. Their tongues are diverse in speech, and their form likewise. Their skins are distinguished, for thou distinguishest the peoples. Thou makest the Nile in the nether world, and bringest it whither thou wilt, in order to sustain mankind. Thou hast also put a Nile in the sky, that it may come down for far-off peoples, and make waves upon the hills like a sea, to moisten their fields and their townships.

'Thou art in mine heart, and there is none other that knoweth thee save thy son, whom thou makest to comprehend thy designs and thy might. Thou thyself art life-time, and men live in thee. Thou raisest them up for thy son, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, who liveth on truth (*ma'at*), son of Re, lord of diadems, Akhenaten, great in his duration, and for the great royal consort whom he loveth, mistress of the Two Lands, Nefernefretiti, that liveth and is young for ever and ever.' (Erman & Blackman: *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, pp. 289–291 [condensed]. Cf. *Psalm civ.*)

We see from this that the new faith is remarkably free from magic and mythology. There is nothing very spiritual about it, or even very moral, except perhaps its insistence on *ma'at*, which meant not only truth but righteousness in general. It is rational and materialistic, dwelling on the joy of life in contrast to that preoccupation with the hereafter which clouded orthodox Egyptian thought. It is surprisingly international in its outlook, setting foreigners on a par with the favoured children of the Black Earth.<sup>1</sup>

In the small circle of courtiers that surrounded the royal pair, the new doctrines found no lack of adherents—many of them no doubt sincere. But it made no headway against the deadweight of tradition. Loyal subjects prayed that the young king might live till the swan turned black and the raven white, and that his realm might extend as far south as the wind blows and as far north as the sun shines. In fact, his reign of about eighteen years saw Egypt's hard-won Asiatic empire melt away. When, a few years later, another boy king changed his name from Tutankhaten ('Living Image of Aten') to Tutankhamen, the victory of the old gods was assured and their priests could chant in triumph:

'The sun of him who knows thee not goes down, O Amon.'

## (ii) *Mazdaism*

Meanwhile, at the opposite extreme of the Near Eastern area, among the mountains of Iran, the Aryan sky god, whom we have conjectured to be the prototype of Aten, remained an object of worship. At some date unknown the Aryans of Iran seem to have registered a split from their kinsfolk in India by a religious schism. While the Vedic Indians worshipped the *devas* (Latin *dei* or *divi*) as gods and recognized the existence of a race of rebel gods called *asuras*, the Iranians regarded the *daevas* as demons and worshipped the *ahuras*.<sup>2</sup> One of these, probably representing the sky god *Dyaus* or *Varuna*, was early singled out under the title *Mazda* ('Wisdom'). A list of gods preserved in Ashur-Bani-Pal's library includes the name *Assara Mazas*, and inscriptions of the great Darius show that he recognized *Ahura Mazda* (the Modern Persian *Ormuzd*) as the heavenly ruler of a world-wide empire.

'Thus says Darius the King: Ahura Mazda saw this world in confusion and gave it to me. He made me its king; I am king. By the grace of Ahura Mazda, I established it in its place. What I ordered them, this they did, as it was my will. If thou thinkest: "Not vast is the country which King Darius holds," then look in that picture at those who carry my throne; there thou wilt witness them. Then will it be known unto thee that the spear of a Persian man has forced its way afar, that far from Persia has a Persian man fought his battles.

'That which I have done, I have done with the grace of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda brought me help, and the other gods that are, because I was not wicked, nor a liar, nor a tyrant, neither I nor my family.

'O man, let not the commandment of Ahura Mazda seem to thee disagreeable. Forsake not the Path of Truth, and sin not.' (Quoted in M. N. Dhalla: *Zoroastrian Civilization*, pp. 215-16.)

Darius' emphasis on 'truthfulness' accords with Herodotus' statement that the young Persian nobles were taught to 'ride, shoot with the bow and tell the truth'. It also echoes the hymn to Aten.

<sup>1</sup> Akhenaten built temples of the new faith beyond the bounds of Egypt—one of them in Canaan at a site which some would identify with Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> It is tempting to connect *asura* and *ahura* with the god *Ashur* and perhaps even with *ashérah* and *Osiris*, but this is shaky ground.

We learn from Herodotus that the Persians at this time worshipped other gods besides the supreme deity, whom he identifies with the Greek *Zeus*. He also speaks of their powerful priesthood, the *Mages*, who gave their name to the *magic* art, and gives us a glimpse of those aspects of Persian worship that struck a foreigner, especially a Greek.

'The Persians do not set up formal images and temples and altars, and they scoff at those who do, presumably because they do not conceive the gods, as the Greeks do, in human form. They sacrifice to Zeus on hilltops, for they call the whole vault of heaven 'Zeus'. They sacrifice also to sun and moon and earth and fire and water and winds. From the Assyrians and Arabs they have learnt also to sacrifice to the Heavenly Goddess (*Uranis*). The Assyrians call Aphrodite *Mylitta*, the Arabs *Alitta* and the Persians *Mitra*.<sup>1</sup> Their manner of sacrifice is such that they neither build altars nor kindle fires, nor use libation or flute or garlands or filets. But the worshipper, usually with myrtle wreathed round his *tiara*, leads his victim to a pure place and calls upon the god. He does not pray for his own good only, but for all the Persians and the Great King. After carving up the victim he lays it on soft herbage, mostly trefol, and a Mage standing by chants a hymn of the birth of the gods. Without a Mage it is not lawful to sacrifice. After a brief pause, the worshipper takes away the flesh and uses it as his reason suggests.' (I, 131-2.)

For some light on the ideas underlying this worship we must turn to the sacred scriptures (the *Avesta*) preserved by the Persian or *Parsi* refugees who fled to India from the followers of Mohammed. If these were less obscure and easier to date, we could fill in some big gaps in the history of human thought. They appear to be fragments of a large literature that existed in the Sasanid age (c. A.D. 230-630), and portions of them evidently reflect the life and thought of that age with only a substratum of ancient tradition. But the *Avesta* also includes hymns that must be of much earlier date, in a language closely akin to that of the *Vedas*. Some might well be among those 'hymns of the birth of the gods' mentioned by Herodotus:

Girded high, tall in stature,  
Of glorious lineage, nobly born,  
Shod with shoes of ankle-height  
Golden-hued and bright,  
Stands she, the good  
Ardvi Sura Anahita<sup>2</sup>  
Clad in fine raiment  
All brodered in gold,  
She of noble lineage wears a necklace  
Around her lovely neck.

(Quoted from the Avestan *Yashts* by Dhalla,  
*op cit.*, p. 54.)

Some express a joyous sun-worship closely akin in spirit to Atenism:

'When the sun uprises, purification comes upon the earth made by Ahura, unto the running waters and the standing, the waters of the wells and of the seas, and all the righteous creation which is of the Holy Spirit. If indeed the sun were not to rise, then the demons would kill all things that are in the Seven Regions.' (Quoted from the Avestan *Nyaish* by the same, p. 55.)

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus has apparently mistaken the sex of this Aryan god.

<sup>2</sup> The worship of *Anahita* (*Anahitis*) as goddess of fertilizing waters became popular throughout the Persian Empire and persisted under Roman rule.

But those hymns (the *Gathas*) which by the test of language are oldest are addressed only to Ahura Mazda, or to such manifest abstractions as 'Good Mind', 'Righteousness' (*Asha* or *Arita*), 'Wholeness' and 'Immortality', which appear to be attributes of Ahura Mazda or ideal attributes of his worshipper. There is no reason to doubt the tradition that this monotheism represents the teaching of the prophet Spitama Zarathushtra (known to the Greeks as Zoroaster), who may well be the actual author of the *Gathas*. He built of course on pre-existing ideas, and the title Ahura Mazda is almost certainly pre-Zoroastrian; but the *Gathas* themselves imply that their teaching is revolutionary and meets with opposition from the established priesthood.

Traditions as to Zoroaster's life are vague and conflicting. Perhaps the likeliest reconstruction is that he was a Mede but taught chiefly in Bactria—probably c. 600 B.C., though some would date him as early as 1000 B.C. The *Gathas* contain some interesting scraps of autobiography:<sup>1</sup>

When first I vexed my spirit with Thy teaching,  
When with Good Mind Thy messenger Obedience  
Drew nigh, he promised hardship and affliction;  
Yet I esteemed Thee bountiful, O Mazda,  
And what Thou callest best, that will I venture.  
(xliii, 11.)

Or again:

To what land shall I turn, Thy worshipper?  
Nor friend nor kinsman, serf nor tyrant prince,  
Will lend his aid How may I serve Thee, Lord?  
(xlii, 1.)

At long last the prophet wins some influential converts, especially 'the valiant king Vishtaspa', and begins to make headway against the *daevas*-worshippers and other 'false teachers'. The essence of the new doctrine is that men, together with most other beings, were created by Ahura Mazda, the source of light and good, but they are free to serve either him or the power of darkness and sin (later more sharply personified as *Angra Mainyu*, Modern Persian *Ahriman*), who had also had a share in Creation.

In the beginning were Spirits twain, by their fruits ye might know them,  
In thought, in word and in deed, one Good and his fellow Evil.  
Between these two the wise choose wisely, not so the unwise.  
When these twain forgathered, they wrought for us life and not-life—  
For the evil an evil world, for the good hereafter the Good Mind.  
Foolishly chose the *Daevas*, by Deception, the Worst Mind, prompted;  
Wildly they plunge into Wrath\* and ruin the life of the mortal.  
Then to his aid there come the Kingdom, and Right and the Good Mind,  
And Love the everlasting, the unshaken, gives him a body.  
Thus, when the day is come of vengeance upon the sinner,  
Then is Thy Kingdom won, Ahura Mazda, by Good Mind  
For those who into the hands of Right have surrendered Falsehood.  
(xxx, 3-8.)

This teaching has something in common with Vishnuism, but its philosophy of life is in sharp contrast to Hindu pessimism. The Zoroastrian world is neither a vale of tears nor a fleeting shadow; it is intensely real and important, a battleground for the free human soul. Zoroaster is an optimist not only in the philosophic sense (believing in the ultimate triumph of good) but in the popular one. He rejoices in the beauty of the world and the fullness of life:

These things I ask Vouchsafe, O Lord, to answer.  
Of whom save Thee was Holiness begotten?

<sup>1</sup> The following passages are based chiefly on the verbatim Latin version in the edition of L. H. Mills.  
\* Later personified as the fiend *Aeshma*. The *Asmodaeus* of the Apocryphal book of *Tobit* probably represents *Aeshma daeva*.

Who set the sun and stars to tread their courses?  
 Who thins the waning moon or fills the waxing?  
 Who holds the earth and stays the clouds from falling,  
 Yoked to their windy steeds? Who woods and waters  
 Created? Who of Good Mind was the author?  
 What cunning craftsman fashioned light and darkness,  
 Waking and sleep, dawn, noon and night—man's prompters?  
 (xliv, 3-5.)

Zoroaster praises creative work—bringing forth children, causing beasts to multiply and the earth to be fruitful. He champions the peaceful cultivator against the marauding nomad. Concerned only with the problems of a simple society, he betrays no knowledge of the complexities of urban civilization.

After Zoroaster's death, his disciples found it hard to live up to the spirit of his teaching; it was easier to sacrifice the tail-bone of a slaughtered beast to his *fravashi* ('genius' or 'guardian angel'). Righteousness and Good Mind are exacting company for the human soul; men felt more comfortable when they had banished them to an exalted station in a hierarchy of angels and archangels, whom the Mages could invoke with prescribed formulae and propitiate with 'Magic' rites. Zoroastrianism was taken over, after some initial opposition, by the Magian priesthood, who managed to find a niche for some of the old gods (notably Mitra) and most of the old ritual. But, while they continued to practise the ancient cults of the sacred fire and the sacred *haoma* juice (Vedic *soma*), they did not wholly lose the moral fervour of the prophet. The newer mythology is still rich in ethical significance—as when it teaches that Angra Mainyu hampered man's labours by creating two fiends named *Delay* and *Afterwards*. And the picture of the universe built up by the Zoroastrian theologians is a work of Miltonic grandeur.

Mazdaism is essentially a universal religion, and Zoroaster himself prayed that he might 'teach the faith to all the living'; but his horizon can hardly have extended far beyond the bounds of Iran. His religion was not widely propagated by foreign missions till the 3rd Century A.D., when the Sasanid kings actively fostered it as a national faith. However, Zoroaster was known by name to Plato and Aristotle in the 4th Century B.C. His royal patron appears to have been a Bactrian prince, probably quite distinct from the Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) who was father of Darius. Though Darius himself worshipped Ahura Mazda and was at odds with the Mages (perhaps on purely political grounds), there is nothing to prove that he acknowledged Zoroaster as Mazda's prophet. Some of the later Achaemenid kings were almost certainly Zoroastrians; but there is little evidence of Zoroastrianism as a regenerative force till Sasanid times. The Persian Empire after Darius was held together by its efficient organization, but it suffered from all the time-honoured vices of Oriental despotism. There is truth in the warning that Herodotus, in the last chapter of his history, puts into the mouth of Cyrus: 'The same land does not bear rich fruits and hardy warriors.' But the Persians had lost more than their hardihood by a too uncritical acceptance of the alluring legacy of Mesopotamian civilization. When they came down from the rugged mountains, where they had 'sacrificed to the vault of heaven', they sacrificed freedom of body and mind to the ancient tyranny of the city gods.

Xerxes son of Darius is said to have wept at the thought that, of all his splendid host, not one would be alive after a hundred years. His father 'the Shop-keeper' looked to the future with a less sentimental eye: in one inscription he admonishes his successors to punish liars 'that the country may be secure'. Perhaps he would not be surprised to find that much of his life's work has become permanently embedded in the economic and administrative skeleton of the best organized human societies. But he can hardly have guessed that they would draw most of their nutriment from lowlier sources—the Jerusalem he patronized and the Athens he came near to enslaving.

## XI

## THE SECOND SURVEY CONTINUED: ISRAEL

*Jew and Gentile*

**I**N the loose-knit empires of the East, there have long subsisted religious communities (Zoroastrians, for instance, or adherents of minor Christian or Moslem sects) whose members maintain a sense of almost national unity that pays little heed to shifting political frontiers. But in the current phase of European civilization, in which human beings are distributed among a limited number of rigidly defined territorial pigeonholes, the landless nation of the Jews appears as a startling and inconvenient anomaly.

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Roman general Titus concluded a bitter struggle in which the various factions in the rebellious province of Judaea and within the walls of the city had fought as fiercely among themselves as against their assailants. To all outward seeming, it marked the end of the stiff-necked Jewish nation itself. Of the Second Temple at Jerusalem, which had stood for centuries as the visible symbol of the unity of the scattered Children of Israel, not one stone was left standing on another. The tax which Jews throughout the Roman Empire had hitherto paid for its maintenance was diverted to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. They had no country of their own. There was no conspicuous difference of race or speech, no tie of political allegiance, to distinguish them from their neighbours, and positive material inducement to efface such difference as existed. In a few centuries at the outside the flimsy barriers between Jew and Gentile would surely disappear and the Jewish minority be merged in the surrounding populations. But the Roman Empire went the way of Nineveh and Tyre; the horsemen of Allah and his Prophet thundered across three continents; the squabbles of Pope and Emperor, feudal king and feudal baron, gave place to the harsher strife of capitalist states hungry for colonies and markets—and still the wandering Jew kept on his lonely way, refusing to be assimilated. Always suspect, often brutally oppressed, excluded from the highways of life to starve or thrive in the ghetto, skilled in medicine, philosophy and music, initiated by his ambiguous fortune into the darker mysteries of politics and finance, he kept himself to himself, ready if need be to answer the Gentile in the words of Shylock:

'The villany you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better my instruction.'

Wherein lay that difference between Jew and Gentile that has not been worn down by 2,000 years of rubbing along together? We may allow something for difference of race, but not much. The Jews before the Dispersion were already a blend of many peoples. There is truth, in a more literal sense than he realized, in the words of Ezekiel:

'Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem: Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was thy father, and thy mother was an Hittite.' (xvi, 3; cf. *Judges*, iii, 5-6.)

Though Hebrew is a Semitic language, the characteristic Jewish features suggest affinity with Hittites, Armenians and other peoples of 'Alpine' race rather than with the main body of Semitic speakers, who are of more 'Mediterranean' type. Even during the most exclusive phases of their history, the Jews have been

more concerned with religious than with racial purity—willing at a pinch to treat 'the stranger that sojourned among them' as one of 'the home-born of Israel', so long as he conformed to the Law of Moses. In the Roman Empire, though it might be difficult to substantiate the recent computation that the Jews at one time formed one-tenth of the total population, it is certain that their numbers were greatly swollen by proselytes. For many Syrians, Carthaginians and others who had lost faith in their own gods but did not take kindly to Graeco-Roman ideas, Judaism was the only spiritual home (before the rise of Christianity) that could command moral and intellectual respect. Sometimes the example of conversion was set by rulers, from Izates viceroy of the Nineveh district in the 1st Century A.D. to the king of the Khazars in the 8th Century, whose Jewish realm in the Ukraine set an example of religious tolerance that found few imitators in Mediaeval Europe. Meanwhile, converts from Judaism, who jumped the gulf without bridging it, have affected the 'racial purity' of Gentile communities. Hence it is not always easy to draw a sharp line between Jew and Gentile on the basis of physical type—except perhaps in countries such as Britain where most Jews are very recent immigrants.

Modern Jews are more clearly marked by certain intellectual traits. Generally forbidden to own land, they have been largely confined to indoor occupations. They are possibly the only considerable section of the European population that can look back to many generations of town-dwelling ancestors. Sometimes they have been permitted no outlet for their talents except in the corrupting business of usury. Despised or envied by their neighbours, they have learnt to stick by one another, thus reaping the advantages of international organization in a war-torn world. In family solidarity and the care of children they have had no equals.

But their one real peculiarity has always been the faith that kept them united and aloof. At bottom, of course, their faith was in a Power not of this world, but it was sustained by an earthly hope and an earthly memory. Some day would come the *Messiah* who, like Moses, would deliver Israel from bondage to the stranger—a God-sent ruler who would restore the glories of the kingdom of David. Yet, if we study impartially the early history of the Jews, even in the glorified version preserved by their own traditions, it seems but meagre fare on which to nourish so robust a faith. It is a record of recurrent tribulations and petty triumphs, which did not strike contemporaries abroad as in any way noteworthy. Later generations, of Gentiles no less than Jews, who have never ceased to turn to it for guidance, have found inspiration not in the events themselves, but in the interpretation put upon them. More than any people, except possibly the Chinese, the Jews have sought in history for a justification of their faith.<sup>1</sup> They have seen the sequence of events as infused with meaning and purpose—the working out of God's will in relation to his Chosen People. They have been People of the Book, and the Book was (or professed to be) largely a history book. Can we still accept it as such?

### *Holy Writ*

Israel's legacy to Christendom included a belief in the 'verbal inspiration' of the Scriptures. This provided unanswerable objections to the rotation of the earth and the evolution of species, and convenient justification for not suffering witches to live and for enslaving the children of Ham. The *Book of Jonah* was

<sup>1</sup> N. Berdyayev (*The Meaning of History*, p. 86) remarks that the Jews 'were the first to introduce the principles of the historical and a keen feeling for historical destiny into the life of mankind', and contrast this (p. 111) with 'the completely unhistorical and anti-historical nature of the ancient cultures of both India and China'. This seems an odd characterization of Chinese culture, but the author may have been thinking of the Chinese tendency to view history as a series of cycles rather than a continuous progression. He refers (p. 86) to the fate of the Jews as a refutation of the materialist interpretation of history.



intended to teach that God has pity even on Israel's chief enemy—'Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.' Perhaps the warring nations might have derived more profit from this message if interest had not been side-tracked to the credibility of one picturesque flight of the story-teller's fancy. Fortunately most expounders of the Scriptures have tacitly ignored those passages that the Devil can most aptly quote for his own ends. Those who were most anxious to swallow Jonah's whale have often jibbed at the plain sense of much more credible episodes and contrived, by twisting it into some far-fetched allegory, to extract a sound moral from the most unedifying tale. Now that the Fundamentalist stronghold is falling and there is no longer much fun to be got out of jeering at the 'mistakes of Moses', it is becoming possible to approach the Old Testament with the same human sympathy and the same reverent curiosity that we should accord to any other of the inspired works of man.

Let us try to approach it as though we had never heard of it before. We find a collection of documents—narratives, laws, sermons, poems, tags of proverbial wisdom—written mainly in Hebrew, partly in Aramaic. The extant manuscripts (none certainly older than the 9th Century A.D.) and the printed editions are based with surprisingly little mutual variation on the standard text fixed by Jewish scholars early in the Christian era. This can be checked by variants in early translations (Greek, Syriac, Latin).<sup>1</sup> These documents were selected out of a larger number for inclusion in the Sacred Canon; some (the *Apocrypha*) were rejected from the Hebrew canon but preserved in the Greek. Others (the *Pseudepigrapha*) have survived separately. Like all collections of religious literature, these documents have been glossed and expounded by many generations of pious commentators, and explanations have been provided for the plentiful difficulties and discrepancies. Many passages have thus acquired meanings which are important for their influence on later thought but possibly quite different from the original meaning. In trying to get at that original meaning—to solve some of those problems of context and background on which meaning so largely depends—modern scholars have at their service not only the technique of critical comparative study but a growing body of external evidence, mainly provided by archaeology. This has shed new light on forgotten customs and ideas. It has shown that, in their statements about neighbouring countries, the Israelite historians were fairly accurate but not infallible. It has provided a cultural setting and a chronological framework for our picture of ancient Israel. It has not 'exploded' the traditional history in its main outlines. But it has brought no positive confirmation of any episode till after the death of Solomon, and surprisingly little for subsequent events. Neither the Israelites nor any other Palestinian people erected monuments on the scale prevalent in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the great powers were not as a rule much interested in their humble neighbour. For the most part, we are driven back to the Old Testament itself.

Different parts of the Old Testament obviously vary immensely in historical, as well as in literary and spiritual, value. The *Book of Daniel*, for instance, appears to be a piece of nationalist propaganda composed as late as 167 B.C. and unreliable in its account of earlier periods, though of great interest for its philosophy of history. On the other hand there is no reason why the *Book of Amos* should not be accepted as substantially the actual writing of that 8th-Century prophet; and the detailed picture of king David's court (2 *Samuel*, ix-xx) must be based on contemporary or almost contemporary sources.

Most critics agree that the *Pentateuch* (the first five books of our Bible) was compiled in priestly circles at Jerusalem after the exile—probably not before

<sup>1</sup> Some early variants are also preserved in the Samaritan version of the *Pentateuch* (current in Northern Israel).

the 5th Century B.C.—from at least four principal sources. Fortunately for the historian the compilers did not attempt a thorough-going revision. Since many episodes, especially in *Genesis* and *Exodus*, are related twice over with differences in detail and general treatment, it is assumed that these represent sections of two parallel narratives roughly pieced together. In one of the narratives (known to critics as *J*) the God of Israel is referred to throughout by the name now read as *Jehovah* and translated into English as 'the Lord'; it was probably pronounced *Yahwe* or *Yahu*, and in personal names it appears in the forms *Jeho-*, *Jo-* and *-jah* (*-iah*).<sup>1</sup> The author or authors of the parallel narrative (*E*), believing that this name was first revealed to Moses on the mount of Horeb (called 'Sinai' in *J*), used instead the title *Elohim*, whose plural form suggests that it may once have been a vague expression for 'whatever gods may be'. By some scholars, *J* and *E* are regarded as individual writers, living in Southern and Northern Israel respectively about 800 B.C. Later contributors were *D*, the reformers responsible for the 'Second Law-giving' (*Deuteronomy*) generally associated with the reign of king Josiah (641-611 B.C.), and *P*, the Priestly compilers themselves. Other books of the Old Testament lend themselves to a similar analysis. The process has been carried so far by some critics that *J* and *E* and *D* and *P* and the rest have in their turn been disintegrated. Perhaps it would be wiser to leave them with Samson and Jonah on the borderland of history and myth, and rest content with the conclusion that there is a considerable gap between the histories as we have them and most of the events with which they deal. It is quite possible that this gap may have been bridged in part by written documents dating from the days of Moses or even of Abraham. More often, it would seem, the writers were dependent on the fallible guide of folk memory, partly enshrined in ancient ballads such as the Song of Deborah (*Judges* v—possibly the oldest passage of any length in the Bible). Many stories, especially in *Genesis* and *Judges*, seem to have been invented to account for some customary practice (e.g. the ritual of the Passover or the worship at Bethel), or some tribal or place name, whose real origin had long been forgotten. The legends of the Earthly Paradise and the Flood are a legacy from remote prehistory, preserved in a form that shows clear marks of Mesopotamian influence. The same is true of many of the laws, whereas others seem to be as late as the 5th Century. Among the latter are some regulations that look like the work of idealists who can have had little hope of ever putting them into practice (cf., for instance, the extraordinary economics of the 'Jubilee Year' in *Leviticus* xxv).

As a last sample of the problems besetting Old Testament studies may be mentioned the difficulty of distinguishing between tribes and individuals. When we read that Gomer and Madai and Javan were sons of Japheth, we know that the author is grouping together three northern peoples—the Cimmerians, the Medes and the Ionian Greeks—without necessarily implying that individuals of these names ever existed, any more than when a modern writer speaks of Neanderthal Man. But was Ishmael a man, or only a tribe?

### *The Kingdom of Israel: Origins and Rise (c. 1950-935 B.C.)*<sup>2</sup>

Bearing in mind these obstacles to a true interpretation, and trying to allow for the various prejudices and literary conventions of the writers, let us turn to the history of Israel as they present it. When the pious Israelite came to offer the firstfruits of his harvest to Jehovah, he repeated the following formula, which

<sup>1</sup> It is now known, from the Ugarit tablets, that a form of this name was current in Canaan as early as the 15th Century. Its origin has been much disputed. One theory connects it with the Sumerian *Ea*. Is it possible that it can have been a variant of the Sanskrit *Dyaus*, introduced into Syria with the Aryan gods by the Mitanni?

<sup>2</sup> See note on p. 77. There is something to be said for putting Abraham as well as Hammurabi about 1800 B.C. or later.

may be taken to summarize the traditions current at an early date as to the origins of the nation:

'A Syrian ready to perish [more accurately "a wandering Aramaean"] was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: and we cried unto the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression: and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.' (*Deuteronomy*, xxvi, 5-9).<sup>1</sup>

In the days of Hammurabi (who may be the Amraphel king of Shinar of *Genesis* xiv) there were many 'wandering Aramaeans' and their kin on the outskirts of Mesopotamian civilization (though the name *Aramaean* is not actually recorded before the 14th Century). Some of these nomads are called in documents of the period *Habiru*, which must surely be the same word as *Hebrew*. It is quite possible that there really was a sheikh of the *Habiru* named Abraham son of Terah who caught something of the religious notions current in that age of disillusionment among the fading glories of 'Ur of the Chaldees' and travelled westward with his household and his flocks under the guidance of his Family God to the neighbourhood of Canaan, where his grandson Jacob or Israel became the founder of a semi-nomadic tribe, 'the Children of Israel'. It is even possible that we have an early confirmation of this tradition in a 15th-Century document recently discovered at the Syrian port of Ugarit (now Ras Shamra), which speaks of an invasion of Canaan by a semi-mythical figure named Terah, who is connected with the moon-god Sin of Ur. Certainly there is archaeological evidence that many such bands established themselves on the desert edge of Canaan about the 18th Century B.C. (a phase of our *First Upheaval*).

The sojourn in Egypt and the deliverance from bondage bulk so large in Israelite folk-memory that we cannot well deny them some basis in fact, though we need not suppose that the ancestors of all the Israelite tribes were involved, any more than a student of later popular tradition need assume that the ancestors of all Americans sailed in the *Mayflower*. The picturesque tales of Joseph and Moses—both rich in local colour—provide material for a conjectural reconstruction. Among the many Asiatics who settled in Egypt during the Hyksos period (c. 1760-1575 B.C.), when several men with Canaanite names rose to prominence, a band of the Children of Israel may have found good pasturage in the land of Goshen, east of the Delta, and maintained their separate identity, with the tenacity of their tribe, for centuries. About 1280 B.C., when Ramses II needed all the labour he could get for his gigantic building works, it was natural enough that he should force some of these strangers to work on fortifying the 'store cities Pithom and Raamses'. Accustomed to the 'flesh-pots of Egypt', they were at first loth to return to the freedom and hardship of the nomadic life. But they were persuaded by an inspired leader to make the sacrifice; and by him they were led forth, evidently under impressive circumstances, to wander once more in the

<sup>1</sup> The offering of firstfruits is one of the most primitive of religious acts, whether as a magical stimulant of fertility or as a thanksgiving for harvest or the hunt. In Israel, like other elements of the national religion, it was linked with the national history and turned into a thanksgiving for an historic deliverance. The familiar phrase that ends this quotation may be compared with the words of an even earlier Palestinian writer preserved in an Ugarit text: 'Now the earth shall grow fat from the rain of heaven; streams of honey shall gush in the valleys.' (C. A. Schaeffer: *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra-Ugarit* [1939], p. 61).

desert. Their leader bore the Egyptian name of *Moses*, and it is just conceivable that there may be some truth in Manetho's story that he was a renegade priest of Heliopolis, the centre of a philosophic sun-worship which must still have borne traces of Akhenaten's great heresy. Certainly there were influences in 13th-Century Egypt that would help him to form his new conception of Israel's tribal God. It accords, however, with the experience of other religious teachers that the sense of divine mission should have come to him while he tended flocks in the desert among the Midianite nomads. Naturally he translated his mystic experience into ideas intelligible to himself and his contemporaries, but in so doing he created something quite new—the concept of a nation indissolubly bound by a mutual compact to a Power who could never be embodied in any human ruler or attached to any material object or any plot of earth. The collective experience of 100 generations has not sufficed to make clear all the implications of this momentous idea; they can only have been darkly apparent to Moses himself, though 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face'.

It is assumed here that Moses was not only an historical personage but one who impressed his personality deeply on the mind of Israel—the originator of that distinctive quality of the Israelite religion that has never been better expressed than in the first two of the Ten Commandments:

'Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands, of them that love me and keep my commandments.'

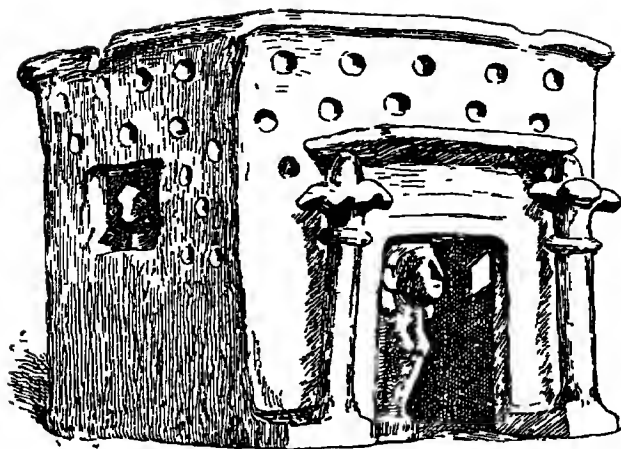
Some scholars believe that this mainly ethical version of the Commandments, given by *E* (*Exodus* xx) and *D* (*Deuteronomy* v) is considerably later than the more purely ritual version given by *J* (*Exodus* xxxiv). They point out that even the *J* version contains features, such as the prohibition of ploughing and harvesting on the Sabbath, that are hardly suited to the band of nomads whom Moses is supposed to have led out of Egypt, and that these Commandments are nowhere stressed in the Prophetic Books. On these lines it is argued that Moses is a mere name, and that the reformers of the Prophetic Age, beginning with Elijah, were themselves the unwitting authors of that lofty conception of 'the God of their fathers' to which they strove to recall their backsliding contemporaries. This must remain an open question. There is no obvious reason, however, why the moral doctrines in the more familiar version of the Commandments could not have been taught in the 13th Century as easily as in the 9th or 8th. And it seems most unlikely that any leader should have won a unique reputation as a man of God on the strength of some magical taboos that must have originated far back in prehistoric times. It is easier to suppose that the traditions clustering round the name of Moses enshrine the memory of one who was not only a great man of action but an ardent mystic and an austere moralist. It is possible to recognize that little of the so-called 'Law' or Revelation (*Torah*)<sup>1</sup> of Moses can be the work of one man—that there must have been many stages, for instance, between the primitive ceremony of the full moon (Akkadian *sabbatu*) and the Sabbatical regulations in *Leviticus*—and at the same time to believe that Jehovah as Moses conceived him, having promised great things to his Chosen People, already demanded

<sup>1</sup> The corresponding Akkadian word means an oracular response obtained by divination.



THE PROMISED LAND

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PHOENICIAN 'GOD'S HOUSE'



RITUAL DANCE ROUND A  
'GREEN TREE'

a more wholehearted allegiance than any deity had ever claimed before and looked into men's hearts to brand unspoken covetousness as sin.

It is worth quoting here a version of the story of Moses which, though it has little claim to independent historical value, shows how the new ideas attributed to him impressed a philosophic Pagan many centuries later:

'Moses, one of the Egyptian priests who held a portion of the Lower Country, went thence to Judaea, being dissatisfied with prevailing ways, and with him went many who honoured the Godhead. For he proclaimed that the Egyptians were mistaken in likening the Godhead to beasts, and even the Greeks in portraying it in human form; for that alone is God which embraces us all and the land and the sea, even that which we call the heaven or the universe or the nature of things. And what sane man would dare to make an image of this resembling anything within our experience? But they ought to give over idol-making and set apart a sacred precinct and a splendid shrine and worship there without an image. And those who live temperately and with justice ought to expect good from God, and always some gift or sign, but others not. So saying, he persuaded not a few thoughtful men and led them away to that place where is now the Temple at Jerusalem. He held it easily, for the place is not attractive nor such as one would eagerly fight for. It is a rocky spot, lying in the midst of barren and arid country. . . . At first his successors followed in his footsteps, acting justly and reverently. But later generations fell under the sway of superstition and tyranny.' (Strabo, xvi, 2 (35-37) [quoting Posidonius?].)

Strengthened by new experience, the worshippers of Jehovah began once more (at the time of our *Second Upheaval*) to abandon their nomadic habits and seek a footing in the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> Under the leadership of Joshua, if we are to believe the book that bears his name, they completed the conquest of Canaan with a speed and thoroughness which a modern dictator might envy. Of tribe after tribe we read that 'he took all the cities thereof and smote them with the edge of the sword and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein'. This bloodthirsty and unconvincing narrative is evidently designed to show how the Lord of Hosts dealt with his enemies in the good old days when Israel obeyed his commandments. It is implicitly contradicted by the *Book of Judges* and the whole course of later history. The first invasion can have been only the beginning of a gradual, complicated and intermittent process, leading eventually to a complete fusion of the newcomers with the older population, itself the product of many such fusions in the past. For centuries the invaders had no more than a precarious hold on the highlands, sandwiched between the civilized peoples of the plain (where the Pharaohs still exercised a vague authority) and the restless nomads of the desert. At one time:

'The Lord was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the hill country; for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.' (*Judges* i, 19.)

At another time:

'When Israel had sown, the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; . . . and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no

<sup>1</sup> A reference to 'Israel' in an inscription of Pharaoh Merneptah, about 1225 B.C., suggests that the settlement began before that date.

sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, they came in as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number: and they came into the land to destroy it.' (*Judges* vi, 3-5.)

But, between the Devil and the deep sea, the Israelites held their own. The Twelve Tribes, which later tradition pictures as having parcelled out the land among them, were an indeterminate number of loosely organized clans, probably of diverse origin, whose chieftains ('judges' or 'champions') must have resembled, more closely than the chroniclers admit, the 'kings' of the Canaanites.<sup>1</sup> They shared a common faith in Jehovah, and could be brought to act in concert against a pressing danger by the influence of some outstanding fighter or holy man. The Song of Deborah is a memorial of one such combined effort against the plainsmen, whose leader Sisera bears an Egyptian name. Several of the clans are rebuked for not joining in; Judah is not even mentioned as a member of the confederacy. A more durable union was forced upon the clans by the attempts of the Philistine cities to establish their alien Minoan culture in the land that still bears their name—Palestine. They were foiled by the genius of two men—the gloomy fanatic Saul and the genial realist David. Saul's reputation has been blackened by partisans of his rival, and by those who thought it a sin of Jehovah's subjects that they should wish to be ruled by an earthly king 'like all the nations'. Of David, the 'man after Jehovah's own heart', we have a more lifelike portrait than of any other character in history before the Classical Age of Greece. We know his treachery and his charm, his passionate sinning and repenting, his fiery poetry and cool statesmanship. He consolidated an Israelite kingdom extending from Damascus to the Red Sea. By his active commercial policy, including an alliance with Tyre, he opened to the hard-living peasantry of Palestine the road to unimagined wealth. Above all, by capturing the Jebusite stronghold Jerusalem and making it a permanent religious as well as political centre, he gave new strength to the force on which Israel's unity and greatness mainly depended.

During David's reign (1029-974 B.C.?) the power of Egypt was at a low ebb; the great days of the Hittites were over, and those of Assyria had not yet begun. At almost any other time the attempt to build a powerful kingdom in the middle of the 'Fertile Crescent' would have been rather like pitching a tent on a main traffic artery. Perhaps in any event the 'throne of David' would soon have begun to totter; but its fall was hastened by his son. The proverbial wisdom of Solomon must have resembled that of Charles II, who

. . . never said a foolish thing  
Nor ever did a wise one.

His lavish expenditure on the Temple at Jerusalem endeared him to the priestly historians; but the Temple was little more than a chapel to his palace. His 700 wives (including an Egyptian princess) and 300 concubines, his 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, his navy of Tarshish bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks, his silver as stones and cedars of Lebanon as sycomores for abundance—these things appealed strongly to one side of the Hebrew character; but they also inspired the words of the Deuteronomist:

'[The king] shall not multiply horses to himself; . . . neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.' (*Deuteronomy* xvii, 16-17.)

<sup>1</sup> The name *Canaanite* (= 'Lowlander'?) is here used, as in *J*, to denote collectively the Semitic peoples whom the Israelites found settled in Canaan. Sometimes, as in *E*, the name *Amorite* seems to bear the same general sense.



The skilled labourers employed on his gorgeous buildings were Phoenicians, and he had no means of paying them except by giving away 'twenty cities of Galilee' to Hiram king of Tyre; the unskilled workers were his own subjects, and upon them he laid a heavy yoke. He lost many of David's conquests. Worst of all, his foreign wives turned away his heart after their gods. His Egyptian alliance, which especially offended the orthodox, turned out badly. There was a change of dynasty there, and the new king Shishak (founder of Dynasty XXII) was suspicious of his wealthy neighbour and lent his support to the discontented party in Israel. When Solomon's successor Rehoboam 'forsook the counsel of the old men' and adopted the naked despotism recommended by 'the young men that were grown up with him', revolt was headed by Jeroboam, who had been living as a refugee at Shishak's court. Jeroboam founded the new kingdom of Northern Israel or Ephraim. Only Jerusalem, with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, remained faithful to the house of David. Then

'in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house.' (I Kings xiv, 25-26.)

An inscription of Shishak recording this invasion is the earliest external source that specifically corroborates the biblical narrative.

### *The Prophetic Protest*

From a casual reading of the *Books of Kings*, we might well conclude that the age of the Divided Kingdoms (c. 935-586 B.C.) was a welter of bloodshed and iniquity, culminating in disaster. A closer study, in the light of the Prophetic Books, helps us to sympathize with men who were struggling to adjust themselves to civilized ways of life without sacrificing the spiritual heritage of the desert. In this struggle the ideal of Moses was so enriched and invigorated that it proved able to survive disaster and even to thrive upon it.

Racial and cultural fusion proceeded so fast that men could soon believe that the Canaanites had been exterminated. The archaeological remains might suggest that it was the Israelites who had been exterminated, or at least completely absorbed. The old style of building continues almost unchanged; the pottery after c. 1000 B.C. is rather clumsier in workmanship but not strikingly different in design. The wanderers entered gladly into the wealth of the Promised Land—'great and goodly cities which they builded not, houses full of all good things which they filled not, cisterns hewn out which they hewed not, vineyards and olive trees which they planted not' (*Deuteronomy* vi, 10-11). Naturally they had few improvements to suggest on a way of life that had been evolved through thousands of years to meet the requirements of soil and climate. They made no great change in the Canaanite language. The one new thing they had brought, and with which they would not willingly part, was the religion that had made them a nation. Jehovah was their god, and they were his people. He had kept his part of their contract, and they had no wish to fail in theirs. But, whatever Moses may have taught, his followers did not all think consistently of his God as the only god. An Israelite says very reasonably to a Moabite:

'Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever Jehovah our god hath dispossessed from before us, them will we possess.' (*Judges* xi, 24.)

The Moabites, a neighbouring pastoral people, had precisely the same notion of competing tribal deities, as we know from the inscription of Mesha king of Moab

(c. 850 B.C.) recording a victory of Chemosh over Jehovah. In some mysterious way Jehovah travelled about with his people in their wanderings. He had his own tent, where his will could be ascertained by divination. At the same time, his real home was far away in the southern deserts, in Sinai or Seir. The gods of Canaan were near. And how was it possible to till their soil without performing those age-old rites which had always been deemed as essential to agriculture as ploughing or sowing?

On hill-tops or 'high places' throughout Canaan, and much farther afield, stood pillars of stone or wood (*ashērah*: plural *ashērim*) or other sacred objects (later elaborated into altars and idols) at which countless generations of villagers had assembled at the crises of the farmer's year to fertilize their fields and flocks by pouring out water or wine or oil or blood and uttering appropriate charms. At first this may have been magic pure and simple. Now the stone had become a 'house of God' (*Beth-El* or *baetyl*), the libation a sacrifice, and the charm a prayer to the local personification of the vegetative powers (*Tammuz*) and his consort (*Astarté*).<sup>1</sup> These festivals not only accorded with the scientific notions of the time; they also satisfied a wide range of men's emotional needs. Peasants expressed their gratitude for rainfall or harvest in rustic jollifications with feasting, music and dancing, leading up to sexual unions consecrated to the powers of fecundity (or designed to stimulate them). Where villages had grown into wealthy towns, the priesthood dramatized the ritual into impressive works of art enacting the myth of the Year God who dies and is born again and weds the goddess who had born him. Music and pageantry went hand in hand with human sacrifice and with sanctified prostitution and mutilation. The ceremonial was an act of state, an indispensable function and prop of royalty. It was also what the Greeks called a *mystery*, cleansing the initiate of the sense of sin and opening the door to a richer life here and perhaps hereafter.

This Canaanite religion rested on the same ideas which we have found expressed in various forms in all the ancient civilizations and which cannot have been wholly strange even to the nomadic Israelites. But its contrast to their simpler worship and more austere morality at once fascinated and horrified them. Lacking the Greek gift of discrimination, they oscillated between ecstatic surrender and wrathful hostility to the 'abominations of the heathen'—the same mixed feelings that affect the modern Bedouin, who has kept the Puritanism of the desert. Some enthusiasts, such as the Rechabites, saw no way of serving Jehovah except by rejecting civilization and agriculture and private ownership of land altogether:

'For Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons, for ever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye sojourn.' (*Jeremiah xxxv, 6-7.*)

But most of the new settlers, as they merged with the native peasantry, continued the rites in honour of the local *Ba'al*, identifying him (if they thought about the matter at all) with their own Jehovah. We know now from the Ugarit tablets that the Canaanites in the 15th Century were not only familiar with the name *Yahwe* but already had a conception of a High God, called simply *El*, corresponding to the God Most High (*El Elyon*) who is described in *Genesis* (xiv, 18) as

<sup>1</sup> The general Canaanite (and Hebrew) word for 'god' was *El* (plural *Elohim*). Almost synonymous were the terms *Adonai* ('lord'), *Ba'al* ('master' or 'owner') and *Melek* or *Moloch* ('king'), titles applied to the invisible patrons or proprietors attached to every locality from a city to a well. The Vegetation God *Tammuz*, known to the Greeks as *Adonis* (i.e. *Adonai*), was also called *Na'aman* ('beloved'), whence the name *anemone* given to the red spring flowers regarded as drops of his blood.

worshipped at Jerusalem in the days of Abraham. There was thus no sharp break between the old faith and the new. The prophets agree that the Israelites 'went up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot'.<sup>1</sup> Today these holy places of the Canaanite are holy places still, and his 'Arab' descendant worships there at the shrine of the local saint with more care than he bestows on the worship of Allah.

If the prohibition of 'graven images' or 'molten gods' (to quote the *J* version) was an authentic piece of Mosaic *Torah*, it was by no means strictly observed. The histories, and still more the prophetic writings, suggest that there may not have been much exaggeration in Jeremiah's sweeping statement:

'The house of Israel . . . their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, say unto a stock, "Thou art my father"; and to a stone, "Thou hast brought me forth".' (*Jeremiah* ii, 26-27.)

Even the Levite caste, who (like the Brahmins in India) adopted many elements of the native cult, felt the need of some visible object of worship in the shape of a brazen serpent or Aaron's golden calf. Ezekiel (viii) describes the 'great abominations' which he saw in Jehovah's own house—'creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about'; women at the north gate weeping for Tammuz, and men worshipping the sun towards the east. Now that Jehovah had ceased from his wanderings and taken up his abode in the fine new temple that Solomon had built for him at Jerusalem, he seemed well on the way to become a lesser counterpart to Marduk of Babylon or Amon of Thebes.

But there were some who had not forgotten the God of Moses. The spirit of religious reform affected even the Levites, among whom the Temple priests at Jerusalem were coming to form a privileged inner circle. These had quite material motives for looking askance on the worship at rival sanctuaries, and one of the main objects of the Second Lawgiving was to suppress it altogether:

'Ye shall surely destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: and ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars,<sup>2</sup> and burn their *Asherim* with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods; and ye shall destroy their name out of that place. Ye shall not do so [offer worship at these shrines] unto the Lord your God. But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: and thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes [etc.].' (*Deuteronomy* xii, 2-6.)

The same reformers strove to purge the worship at Jerusalem of idolatry and other 'abominations'. Their ideal was a centralized authority imposing an orderly and dignified worship of the jealous god of Israel. They also tried to enforce the moral and social commandments of the *Torah*, adding new provisions to meet the needs of a more complex society, often in a very humanitarian spirit (e.g. they set a high standard for the treatment of slaves). But a privileged priesthood could not convincingly attack the increasing social inequalities that underlay many of the evils of the day. They neglected the needs of the common man, even his religious needs, which had found some satisfaction at the local sanctuaries

<sup>1</sup> *Jeremiah* iii, 6. Cf. *Ezekiel* vi, 13; xvi, 16; *Hosea* iv, 13; 2 *Kings* xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the recent discoveries at Avebury, which suggest that some of the standing stones there were broken and buried in the 14th Century A.D., presumably at the instigation of the Church.

they wished to suppress. It was not easy to vivify the cold aloofness of the purified worship with a spiritual fervour that might compensate for the emotional excitement of the pagan cults.

The main impulse to religious reform came (as in India) from individual laymen. The priests and Levites, revered as guardians of traditional lore, were not (as in Catholic Christendom) the indispensable mediators between man and God. The spirit of God might descend upon any man. Among the Semitic peoples this divine possession has often manifested itself in an extravagant guise. When Wen-Amon visited Byblos in the 12th Century B.C., he attended a state sacrifice by the prince at which a noble youth had a fit of religious frenzy that lasted all night. And to this day the Dancing Dervishes show their zeal for Allah by spinning round on one foot, howling, shrieking and groaning, till they drop down exhausted. Such evidently were those 'prophets' whom Saul met

'coming down from the high place [*i.e.* a Canaanite shrine] with a psaltery, and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp. . . . And the spirit of God came upon him also . . . ; and he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied . . . and lay down naked all that day and all that night. (1 Samuel x, 5 and xix, 23-24—variants of the same story.)

There were other prophets whom the spirit moved to more fruitful activity. In the line of God's 'holy prophets, which have been since the world began', we may fitly include such great figures as Nathan, the court priest who effectively rebuked his royal master David; or Samuel, the 'seer' attached to the temple at Shiloh, whose anointing of Saul was accepted (according to one account) as giving divine sanction to his kingship; or even Moses himself, and the ancient Patriarchs. But the true Prophetic Age begins with Elijah (*c.* 860 B.C.) and continues to the return from Exile. Many of the prophets were Southerners, but they were more conspicuous in the Northern Kingdom, where there was no organized priesthood comparable to that at Jerusalem. They varied greatly in personality and teaching. Isaiah<sup>1</sup> was a noble, Amos a shepherd, Jeremiah a provincial priest. Some were fiercely patriotic, inveighing against Jehovah's enemies with a detailed pungency that shows a wide knowledge of foreign affairs. Others looked to the day when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. Their common ground was a conviction that what Jehovah chiefly demands from his servants is holiness and righteousness. Like the Chinese sages, they were striving to translate ritual and magical ideas into moral and spiritual ones. This is evident in the word of the Lord as it came to Amos, the first of the prophets who was not only a preacher but a pamphleteer:

'I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgement roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.' (*Amos v, 21-24*).<sup>2</sup>

Though the prophets might join with the priests in deploring popular backslidings into paganism, they struck at the root of priestly authority by their revolutionary doctrine of 'rendering as bullocks the offering of the lips' and making a contrite heart the truest sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* the 8th-Century prophet whose writings are contained in the first thirty-nine chapters of the *Book of Isaiah*. The later chapters were apparently written at least 200 years later, after the Exile.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* the passage quoted above (p. 73) from the *Admonitions to Mers-ke-re*.

In decrying those magical functions that conferred a mysterious sanctity on rulers, the prophets were undermining the State as well as the Church, or rather they were setting both on a more rational basis that laid them open to criticism if they did not function properly. In Israel, as elsewhere, kings were often oppressive, officials extortionate and judges corrupt, and subservient priests and 'false prophets' gave a religious sanction to the enterprising minority who seized the lion's share of the increasing fruits of land and labour. If some men had not gained power over their fellows, it is doubtful whether civilization could ever have developed; and they would not have been human if they had not used it in part to gratify selfish desires. Everywhere they have been checked not only by the limits of human endurance but by fellow feeling and by custom, from whose taboos men have laboriously built their codes of law and morality. But nowhere was the abuse of power so early and so explicitly denounced as by the Hebrew prophets, who saw all authority as delegated by a righteous God and therefore to be judged by an external standard of 'righteousness'. Elijah curses Ahab king of Ephraim not only because 'he did very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites did, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel', but also because, in depriving Naboth of his vineyard, he had 'sold himself to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord'. In Judah likewise *Deuteronomy* (xvii, 19-20) lays down that the king is to write a copy of the Law and 'read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law . . .; that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren.'

Lesser offenders do not escape the same condemnation.

'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!' (*Isaiah* v, 8.)

'Forasmuch therefore as ye trample upon the poor, and take exactions from him of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink the wine thereof. . . . Hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgement in the gate: it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. . . . Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light.' (*Amos* v, 11-18.)

'Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor judgement, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us." . . .

'Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' (*Micah* iii, 9-11; vi, 7-8.)

Besides social injustice, the prophets condemned such vices as drunkenness and fornication, and many of what we should consider the innocent amenities of civilization—music and pageantry and 'pleasant imagery' and fine clothes, 'the head-tires and the ankle chains and the sashes and the perfume boxes and the

amulets'. These were not only badges of worldliness and of squandered wealth; they were inseparably bound up with pagan worship. This is probably the main reason why the legacy of Israel has helped to burden after ages with the clash between love of goodness and love of beauty.

Most Hebrew thinkers were content to accept as an axiom the assertion that

The way of the Lord is a strong hold to the upright;  
But it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity.

(*Proverbs* x, 29.)

Only in the *Book of Job* (5th or 4th Century B.C.?) is there a serious attempt to reconcile this with the fact (or seeming fact) of unmerited suffering; and here it is solved only by the admission that God's ways are incomprehensible. 'Shall he that cavilleth contend with the Almighty?'<sup>1</sup> The simplest way to vindicate God's justice is to call in another world to redress the balance of this. The notion of retribution after death had long been familiar in Egypt, and was increasingly stressed in the Mystery Religions that were developing throughout the Near East. Perhaps for this very reason, the Israelites long fought shy of it. Their notions of the hereafter did not extend beyond a vaguely conceived semi-consciousness in *Sheol* ('the pit' or 'the grave'), a counterpart of the Mesopotamian *Aralû* or the Greek *Hades*, where 'the soul dwells in silence' (*Psalms* xciv, 17). During the Exile, perhaps under Zoroastrian influence, the notion of Heaven and Hell gained a footing in Israelite thought. Eventually it became part of the teaching of the Pharisees (who were hard put to it to find any warrant for it in the Scriptures)<sup>2</sup> and thus entered into orthodox Judaism. About the same time, and perhaps under the same influence, the Jews began to relieve Jehovah of direct responsibility for the evil in the world by giving him an 'Adversary' (*Satan*), corresponding to the Iranian Angra Mainyu, and exalting him above human affairs by interposing legions of angels.

Another solution of the problem of evil is suggested in the words of that inexperienced Psalmist who had 'never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread' (*Psalms* xxxvii, 25). If a man did not always seem to be reaping the fruits of his own deeds, perhaps he was reaping where his forbears had sown. In their tribal days the Israelites, like other primitive peoples, had regularly 'visited the sins of the fathers on the children', and they expected their God to do likewise. But the doctrine of individual responsibility gained ground. *Deuteronomy* enacts that

'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.' (xxiv, 16.)

Ezekiel declares emphatically that Jehovah acts according to the same law.

'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, and hath

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Mesopotamian writer quoted on p. 86. It has been suggested that the author of *Job* may have been familiar with Athenian drama.

<sup>2</sup> The clearest reference in the Old Testament to the resurrection of the dead is in the 2nd-Century *Book of Daniel* (xii, 2): 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.'

not eaten [sacrificial food] upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a woman in her separation; and hath not wronged any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; he that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgement between man and man, hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgements, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God. If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth any one of these things . . . : He shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins, which he hath done, and feareth, and doeth not such like . . . ; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.' (xviii.)

Nevertheless, the notion of collective punishments and rewards continued to colour Hebrew thought. The prophets scanned history for evidence of Jehovah's judgements upon his people, and the historians interpreted the vicissitudes in Israel's story on the assumption that they were directly due to the conduct of the whole nation. In *Deuteronomy* Jehovah is made to declare:

'If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments, . . . blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed in the field. . . . The Lord shall cause thine enemies to be smitten before thee. . . . And all the peoples of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee. . . . The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure the heaven to give the rain of thy land in its season. . . . But if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, . . . cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed in the field [etc.].' (xxviii.)

Sometimes, as we may see by comparing the life-story of Josiah or Manasseh in *Kings* with the later and more moralized version in *Chronicles*, this quest for God's handiwork in history tempted writers to distort the course of events. But it led the more sincere seekers to modify their conception of God's purpose in the light of facts.

If it was possible to assign a reason for Jehovah's actions in the past, it must be possible to 'prophesy' (in the modern sense) what he would do in the future. The earlier prophets laid claim not so much to 'second sight' as to knowledge of God's will; as this was a fixed moral law, it gave sure grounds (like the natural law of modern science) for prediction.<sup>1</sup> As the passage quoted from *Deuteronomy* xxviii shows, they did not distinguish these two fields of Divine operation. They accepted natural phenomena incuriously as 'wonders of God' without seeking to 'enter into their treasures'. A low opinion of contemporary morals convinced them that terrible things were about to befall. But these horrific prophecies were not wholly comfortless. If Israel could not prevail against Assyria or Babylon, it was not because Ashur or Marduk was stronger than Jehovah. Rather, the heathen were instruments of Jehovah's will—scourges that he had raised up to chasten his Chosen People. If righteousness is indeed supreme, there can be no room for divided counsels in Heaven. If the prophets taught true, there could be only one God of mankind, beside whom the gods of the Gentiles could rank

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Deuteronomy* xviii, 22: 'When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.'

merely as 'demons'. And surely the one God would not utterly forsake the people whom he had chosen to bear witness to his name!

*The Divided Kingdom and the Exile (c. 935-530 B.C.)*

Throughout the age of tumultuous social and spiritual growth mirrored in the Prophetic Books, the kingdoms of Judah and Ephraim were involved in perpetual clashes with each other and with their immediate neighbours, especially the Syrian cities to the north. Eventually they were dragged willy-nilly into the conflicts of the great powers, Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. Judah remained loyal to the descendants of David, but of most of them we know little except that they either, like Josiah, 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord' by suppressing the idolatrous worship at the 'high places', or else 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord'. In Ephraim, where Jeroboam failed to establish a lasting dynasty, many of the kings met violent deaths at the hands of usurpers, who tended to be more vigorous personalities than the hereditary rulers of Judah. They also found themselves compelled by geographical causes to take a more active part in world politics. As they had no authority over Jerusalem, they could not do right in the eyes of the Lord (or his priestly historians) by furthering worship at the one legitimate Temple, but they did not all do as much as Ahab to 'provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger'.

Ahab's father Omri, whose splendid new capital Samaria has lately been laid bare by excavation, seems to have been a great ruler, and Ahab himself was a successful warrior king. An Assyrian inscription tells us, what the Bible does not mention, that in 853 B.C. he contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 foot-soldiers to an anti-Assyrian alliance headed by the Syrian king Hadadezer (Benhadad). But his foreign alliances angered the orthodox, especially when he married Jezebel daughter of the king of Sidon and built for her a temple of the Phoenician *Ba'al* in Samaria. After his death a rebellion was organized in Jehovah's name by the prophetic party, including the Rechabites; they found a mouthpiece in Elisha, on whom the mantle of Elijah had fallen, and a zealous leader in Jehu son of Nimshi, whom they succeeded in making king. An Assyrian carving depicts a figure, not 'driving furiously' but prostrate in submission, who is styled (with unconscious irony) 'Jehu son of Omri'. Jehu may have been an unscrupulous adventurer; but his success demonstrates how many Israelites supported the prophetic ideal, though they might fall far short of putting it into practice.

Individual rulers might find it advisable, as Jehu did, to submit to Assyrian overlordship; but the people of Ephraim were generally ready enough to join any coalition that promised hope of effective resistance. In 721 B.C. they met the fate of so many 'rebels' against the might of Ashur: according to an Assyrian practice which we used to think had vanished for ever, some 30,000 (?) of them, drawn especially from the wealthier classes and the intelligentsia, were deported and settled elsewhere in the Empire, and their place was partly filled by immigrants from Mesopotamia. From this mixed population sprang the Samaritans and Galilaeans of later times. The deported minority must have merged in part with their foreign hosts, but some families doubtless preserved their national identity so that their descendants could be reckoned among the Israelites of the 'Dispersion', who are found in scattered communities over the Near East from the 6th Century at latest. Some recently discovered papyrus letters (written in the 5th Century B.C.) give us a glimpse of one such community in southern Egypt whose members apparently combined the worship of *Yahu* (Jehovah) with that of several other gods and goddesses. There is nothing unusual or mysterious about the disappearance of these 'lost Ten Tribes'; what is almost a miracle is the survival of their brethren of Judah (with Benjamin), the people whom we may now begin to call the Jews.



Judah's turn did not come till more than a century later, when Assyria had given place to the short-lived Babylonian or Chaldaean Empire. In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who adopted the Assyrian policy towards 'rebels',

'carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin [king of Judah] to Babylon'. (2 Kings xxiv, 14-15.)

Jeremiah (lii, 28) gives the number of the captives as only 3,023. In 586 B.C. there was a rebellion and a second deportation, when (according to Jeremiah) 832 men were carried away. On any computation, the number of exiles was not large; but their sojourn by the waters of Babylon was not less fateful than the sojourn in Egypt 1,000 years before. It can no longer be plausibly maintained that this was the first introduction of the Israelites to Mesopotamian civilization; but it is likely enough that in Mesopotamia (even before Cyrus' conquest of Babylon in 538 B.C.) they met Iranians who had listened to the message of Zoroaster. Thus, for the first time, they would be brought into direct contact with men whose conception of God was comparable to their own—less insistently moral, perhaps, but more systematic and freer from cramping nationalism. But, even apart from this influence, the mere fact of exile was profoundly significant. The gloomy prophets had been right: Jehovah had punished his people for their sins. But in so doing he had proved his power. He had broken one instrument of his wrath, Assyria; and Babylon was soon threatened with a like fate. Perhaps he was preparing a glorious vindication for his people, being penitent. The burden of the earlier prophets had been: 'The day of the Lord is darkness and not light'. Now in the darkest hour their message is 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.' The wiser heads counselled patience:

'Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; . . . and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city [or 'land'] whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Let not your prophets that be in the midst of you, and your diviners, deceive you, neither hearken ye to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end. . . . And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart . . . And I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you; and I will bring you again unto the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.' (Jeremiah xxix.)

The exiles might still weep when they remembered Zion. But they were learning that Jehovah's kingdom could exist as a spiritual reality in the hearts of his worshippers, with no visible counterpart.

*After the Exile: New Problems and Parties (c. 530 B.C.-70 A.D.)* \*

Before Jeremiah's 'seventy years' were up, Babylon had fallen, and the Persian conqueror was willing, here as elsewhere, to adopt a more tolerant policy.

The history of the return of some of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, as recounted in the Books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, is confused, and there are many gaps in the records of the next few centuries. But the further development of Jewish thought is so significant that it is desirable to attempt a brief summary here, even though it lies outside the period of our present survey.

The Temple, which is said to have been completed in the sixth year of Darius (516 B.C.), became the centre of a Jewish community in which the handful of returned exiles claimed a pre-eminence that was resented by the stay-at-homes. At first it was natural to assume that a ruler of the house of David would be set up, of course under the suzerainty of Persia. But gradually there developed a type of government for which the historian Josephus afterwards coined the name *theocracy*—government by God through an aristocracy of priests and elders (or 'heads of houses'). The supremacy of God was no mere pious fiction. It meant in practice the supremacy of the *Torah* that God had revealed to Moses. *Nehemiah* gives a vivid picture of that solemn occasion when

'all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding . . . And he read therein . . . from early morning until midday. . . . And all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.' (viii.)

So they renewed their covenant with Jehovah, and swore that henceforward they would no more forsake his house.

So long as the Persian satrap received his tribute, the ruling class of Temple dignitaries and landlords were free to govern the faithful of the Jerusalem area according to their own interpretation of the Law. Naturally they tended to be conservatives, sticklers for the niceties of Temple ritual and suspicious of doctrinal or social innovations. In dealing with the many matters not covered by the letter of the law, they followed the dictates of common sense and a worldly morality which was cosmopolitan rather than Israelite in tone. There are echoes of this in the Wisdom Literature (*Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, etc.), though these writings do not represent the work of any consistent school of teachers, and some were probably not written in Palestine at all. This upper class was always open to foreign influence; and, after Alexander's conquest (332 B.C.) had substituted a Macedonian for a Persian overlord, many yielded to the attraction of Greek culture. The unwise attempt of Antiochus IV to suppress Judaism provoked the violent reaction of the Maccabean Revolt (167 B.C.). But, when the Maccabean leaders themselves had established their rule as hereditary high priests over a secular kingdom as extensive as that of David, even they were obliged to adopt a more worldly and tolerant policy. So the old ruling class, now with the distinctive name of *Sadducees*, returned to power, which they retained till the destruction in A.D. 70. They contrived to make terms with the Edomite dynasty of Herods, who were Jews only by adoption and not over devout, and later with the Roman governors. But their position depended on the existence of a Jewish state; when it fell, they fell.

Meanwhile, in opposition to these Conservatives, there had grown up a party whom we may fairly call Liberals or Low Churchmen. Their leaders were the lay teachers of the *Torah* at first known as *Scribes*, later as *Pharisees* and ultimately as *Rabbis*. They may be regarded as successors of 'Ezra the scribe'; like him, they read and expounded the Law of Moses, i.e. the *Pentateuch* or parts of it, and later also the prophetic writings, to 'congregations' (*synagogues*) of the faithful. Their

followers were drawn chiefly from the middle class of town-dwellers that was coming to the fore even in Judaea and was the dominant element among the Jewish communities of the Dispersion. Debarred from control of the Temple sacrifices, they found in the service of the synagogues a substitute that proved more satisfying to the religious needs of the age. Their reading, preaching and prayer realized the prophetic ideal—'the offering of the lips'. Intent upon preserving their national identity in the midst of strangers, they sought to make of the *Torah* a complete and distinctive rule of life. In order to accomplish this, they had to expand its provisions to cover the novel conditions of town life and to meet the higher ethical standards of their day. Sometimes they had to invoke an 'invisible *Torah*', a fuller revelation of God's will of which they were the exponents. They thus reasserted the claim of the prophets to be God's mouthpiece; but they delivered their message not as inspired individuals but as an organized body who arrived at the truth by discussion and transmitted it to their pupils and successors. They were guided by high moral ideals, and did much to soften the harshness of the older law. They introduced certain important novelties in doctrine, including (as we have seen) the belief in a future life. And they heaped up such a mountain of minute regulations (embodied in the *Talmud*) that the precision of the letter left ever less liberty to the spirit. The observance of the Sabbath, for instance, became an exact science requiring years of study. It was so strictly enforced that, when Jerusalem was attacked by Ptolemy I (320 B.C.) on a Sabbath, it was surrendered without a blow through what a Greek historian called 'untimely superstition'.<sup>1</sup> Many must have found the burden of the law quite beyond them; and for some 'the offering of the lips' must have come very near to lip service. Though many of these teachers demanded a high standard in dealings with strangers and encouraged proselytism, their whole system was based on a sharp cleavage between Jew and Gentile. For better and for worse, they were the makers of modern Judaism.

There were other Jews who found neither in Temple nor in synagogue what their hearts craved. Some sought it in Greek philosophy, justifying their desertion of the old ways by the plea that this too was divinely revealed. Certain Alexandrian Jews, notably Aristobulus and Philo, attempted by allegorical interpretation of the *Pentateuch* to show that the Pagan philosophers and poets had derived all their wisdom from Moses. This view was finally summed up in the epigram: 'What is Plato but Moses talking Greek?'—which seemed to some Christians a sufficient reason for *not* reading Plato. At the opposite pole were some who felt, as the Rechabites had done, that the worship of Jehovah was incompatible with civilization. In returning to the simple life, they were influenced by ascetic ideals long familiar in India but hitherto alien to Israelite thought.<sup>2</sup> Before 150 B.C. these ideals had taken shape in the community known as the Essenes.

'The Essenes are Jews by race and seem to have a greater mutual affection than the others. They regard pleasures as evil and the conquest of desire as virtue. Though they do not absolutely condemn marriage as a means to procreation, they eschew wedlock and adopt the children of others while they are still teachable and mould them to their own ways. Those who resort to their order must let what they have be common to all, so that there is no show of wealth or poverty among them. They exchange their goods as need arises, without sale or purchase. They appoint stewards to look after their common affairs. Newcomers are welcomed among total strangers like old friends, and nothing is withheld from them. When they travel they carry nothing with them, except that they are armed against bandits. In

<sup>1</sup> Agatharchides (in Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews* xii, 5).

<sup>2</sup> Can we see here the footprints of Asoka's missionaries? Cf. above, p. 111.

every city where they dwell there is one of the order chosen to care for strangers and provide clothing and other necessities. They never change their clothes till they are quite worn out.

Before dawn they speak no word of profane matters. After prayer at sunrise they go out to their allotted tasks, at which they labour diligently till the fifth hour. Then they reassemble, put on white veils and bathe in cold water, after which they withdraw to an apartment to which outsiders are not admitted. They go into the dining-room as into a holy temple; the baker lays out loaves in order, and the cook sets before each a single plate of one sort of food. The priest says grace before and after meat, praising God as the bestower of food. After the meal they lay aside their [white] robes and go back to work till evening, when they return to sup in the same manner. There is no clamour at meals, but everyone is given leave to speak in turn. The quiet in their house impresses visitors as a solemn mystery. They do everything by the direction of their guardians, except that they are always free to succour the needy and show mercy. Their word is firmer than an oath, and they consider swearing worse than perjury. They carefully study the writings of the ancients, choosing out what is most beneficial to soul and body; and they seek to know medicinal herbs and stones. What they most honour, after God himself, is the name of their law-giver [Moses]. They think it right to obey their elders, and the will of the majority. They are stricter than any other Jews in observing the Sabbath rest. Those who wish to join their order must first undergo a year's preparation and testing. On admission they are pledged to obedience and secrecy, to simplicity in dress, charity, honesty and truthfulness.

Thanks to the simplicity of their diet, many of them live above a hundred years. They despise grief and pain, and make light of death. They believe that their souls are immortal, and that after death the good souls pass to a region gently fanned by a breeze from the ocean, the bad souls to a place of darkness and punishment.' (Josephus: *Wars of the Jews*, ii, 8 [condensed].)

This Utopian community provoked Pliny to an outburst of Roman rhetoric:

'On the west shore of the Dead Sea live the Essenes, the most amazing people in the world, shunning intercourse with women, without money, with only the palms for company. Their number is recruited by a daily stream of newcomers—waifs tired of life, tossed to their society by the waves of fortune. So age after age (who would believe it?) a race is everlasting in which no one is born. So fruitful to them is the world-weariness of others!' (*Natural History*, v, 17.)

Pliny would have been surprised to learn that such harbours from the storms of life were soon to spring up in their hundreds all over the Roman Empire.

The bulk of the Israelites, 'the people of the land', were not so weary of the world as this, but they could not help feeling that the comforting predictions of the later prophets had been but scantily fulfilled. The life of the Chosen People was still a daily grind, not noticeably easier than the lot of their godless neighbours. They still 'required a sign', and they were fed with the most extravagant promises: the Day of the Lord was at hand, a scion of the house of David would appear as their Anointed King (*Messiah*) and win a spectacular victory over their enemies, so that the righteous would 'rejoice over them, because the wrath of the Lord of Spirits resteth on them, and his sword is drunk with their blood'. After that everything would be bright and beautiful. The writers who held out these high hopes, in such books as *Daniel* and the Pseudepigraphic *Enoch* (just quoted),

did not emphasize, as the prophets had done, that God would be found only by those who 'searched with all their heart'. They were avowed visionaries rather than teachers or thinkers. They professed, perhaps with complete sincerity, that they were the passive recipients of a 'revelation' (*apocalypse*). Their technique was that of a deliverer of oracles or a spiritualist medium, and the reader is left wondering whether their rambling narratives, gorgeous visions and grotesque imagery conceal some unutterable truth or only the wanderings of a disordered mind. The Apocalyptic writers naturally tended to foster that fiery nationalism whose devotees came to be known as *Zealots*: they promised salvation for Israel, not for the Gentile world. But there were glimmerings of a larger hope. The *Messiah*, after his world conquest, would 'speak peace unto the nations'.<sup>1</sup> In a post-Exilic section of *Isaiah* (lii-liii) he was even depicted as a 'servant', bruised for the iniquities of mankind. Or are we to take this figure, as some did, for a symbolic picture of the whole Jewish nation, chosen to suffer and atone for the sins of the world? In another (still later?) section of the same book, the Apocalyptic or Messianic vision is combined with an international outlook:

'Also the strangers, that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from profaning it, and holdeth fast by my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar: for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples.' (*Isaiah* lvi, 6-7.)

The same thought is expressed still more explicitly about 100 B.C. in the Pseudepigraphic *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*:

'For through their tribes shall God appear on earth to save the race of Israel, and to gather together the righteous from among the Gentiles.'<sup>2</sup>

Therefore the Jews are bidden to keep the commandments of God till the day comes when 'He shall save Israel and all the Gentiles'.

So far as we know, this vision of a Golden Age for all mankind, not in the past but in the future, was unprecedented in human thought. And no man, whatever his personal belief about the prophecy and its fulfilment, can deny the greatness of the nation whose prophets walked in the light of that vision.

## XII

### THE SECOND SURVEY COMPLETED: HELLAS

#### *Jew and Greek*

THE modern European, even in this machine age, still feeds and clothes and shelters his body with the aid of processes developed at the dawn of civilization in the East. He has not wholly shaken off the web of inter-tangled ideas that held those first civilized communities together: the embodiment of the common life in a ruler who is at once human and divine; the need to stimulate or propitiate the life-giving powers by magical means; the conception of death and blood as physical pollutions, lingering round the grave and defiling

<sup>1</sup> *Zachariah* ix, 10; cf. *Isaiah* ix, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Testament of Naphthali* viii, 3; cf. *Testament of Asher* vii, 3. See R. T. Herford: *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 240.

the murderer and his seed. But modern man has been driving these things and their attendant fears more and more into the subconscious. In their place he has (as an admirer said of Matthew Arnold) 'a Greek mind and a Hebrew soul', transfigured and disfigured but still recognizable. As the teaching of the prophets was a protest against the magical basis of Canaanite society, so the politics and philosophy of Greece cannot be fully understood except as a less explicit criticism of a like element in the early civilization of the Aegean region. We have heard echoes of the same protest elsewhere—in Persia, India, China, even Egypt. But Western civilization derives its distinctive quality mainly from the Hebrew and the Greek protests—all the more because they are radically different.

Perhaps it would be fair to say that the Israelites suppressed the old ideas and the Greeks sublimated them. We do not find the Greeks condemning the 'abominations of the heathen' as an insult to an almighty and all-righteous God. Rather, they modified them in accordance with their conception of the dignity of man, using them as the raw material of an architecture, a sculpture, a drama, a physical science and a social and political fabric that set man and his needs in the forefront. The contrast is well put in the words with which Paul of Tarsus, whose background was partly Jewish and partly Greek, rebukes both alike for their unbelief: 'For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom.' The Jew demanded a good substantial miracle—the son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory—or at least an unshakable conviction that the Word of the Lord had indeed come unto him. The Greek did not ask to be convinced by a sign from above; he wanted to find out for himself. The favourite hero of Greek legend was Odysseus (Ulysses), who 'saw many cities of men' and knew their minds' and would not seal his ears to the music of the Sirens; to the Hebraic soul of Dante he appeared as the type of that sinful presumption which seeks to know what God has thought fit to hide. Herodotus thinks it natural that, in the 6th Century B.C., Greeks should flock to Egypt simply as sightseers. In the 4th Century Plato says that, as the northern barbarians are renowned for their love of danger and the Phoenicians and Egyptians for their love of gain, so are the Greeks for their love of learning. And four centuries later still, Paul found the Athenians 'spending their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing'.

By referring everything to the will of God, the prophets were able to draw a sharp line between right and wrong—sharp as the line between sun-glare and shadow in the desert. They acknowledged no intermediate class between the sheep and the goats, nothing to bridge the great gulf between Dives and Lazarus. Their ideal has always a tinge of exaggeration: there is no mean between 'Solomon in all his glory' and Elijah 'with a girdle of leather about his loins'. In contrast, the Greeks managed to catch something of the tranquil lucidity of their own atmosphere. Aristotle's doctrine that virtue is a mean between two vices (a view shared by the Confucians) was an elaboration of the essentially Greek proverb 'Nothing too much'. The Greeks were perhaps the first people to approach the problems of life with an open mind, seeking to see both sides and if possible to harmonize them. Every page of classical Greek prose bristles with the words *men* and *de* (clumsily translated 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand'), whereby every pronouncement is delicately weighed as by the two pans of a chemical balance. We can picture the Greek, confronted by the ancient civilizations of the East with their venerable hotch-potch of magic and science, history and myth, their priestly kings and kingly priests whose authority was final on all questions under the sun or above it, gazing with childlike curiosity but never hesitating to proclaim: 'This *on the one hand* is good; that *on the other hand* is bad.'

He was intensely interested in the question 'what is good'. He would not have quarrelled with the first part of Micah's definition: 'to do justly and to love



[Vienna

HERCULES MAKES SHORT WORK OF THE EGYPTIANS



[Paris

A MERCHANT PRINCE OF CYRENÉ KEEPS  
AN EYE ON EXPORTS



ΟΙ ΥΜΠΙΑ



ΠΑΡΑ



mercy'. He might have added 'to perform the customary sacrifices to the gods', but almost certainly not 'to walk *humbly* with thy God'. The Hebrew praise of humility, obedience and faith awoke no echo in his soul.<sup>1</sup> He was ready on occasion to 'do and die', but he would not willingly forgo his right to 'reason why'. It has often been pointed out as significant that the Greek word for 'command' means literally 'initiate' or 'take the first step', and to 'obey' (or 'believe') is literally to 'be persuaded'. In politics this self-reliance was ultimately fatal. Greek philosophers might seek as earnestly as any prophet of Israel for *unity*. But, as Olympus remained full of gods, Hellas remained full of disunited states (in Crete alone there were at least forty of them). And in every state there was a perpetual strife between 'the few' and 'the many'. And in the heart of the individual citizen raged that conflict of impulses which Plato thinks typical of the democratic or *isonomic* man.

'So he lives from day to day, humouring every desire as it comes along; now indulging in the wine-cup and the festal flute, now turned teetotaler and going in for slimming; one day an enthusiast for physical fitness, the next lounging and taking things easy, then again a devotee of the philosophic life. Often he takes an interest in politics and, jumping to his feet, says and does whatever enters his mind. Whether his hero of the moment be a soldier or a business magnate, he is equally bent on following in his footsteps. There is no order or binding principle in his life. But this is the life he calls enjoyable and heavenly and fit for a free man, and he gives himself up to it entirely.' (*Republic* viii, 561.)

Such a man was the product of a loosely integrated community, small enough to hold together by free association without that material and spiritual compression which moulded the subjects of the great Oriental empires. And such communities could hardly have developed except in semi-isolated pockets, near enough to one another and to the older centres of civilization to benefit by mutual intercourse but remote enough to remain independent during the formative period. Even so, it was surprising, in the light of previous human experience, that they developed at all.

### *The Unity of Hellas*

The geographical setting of Greek civilization on both sides of the Aegean, though it made political unity difficult, has a certain unity of its own. It has a temperate climate of the 'Mediterranean' type—sunny summers and enough rain in winter to keep the country from becoming a desert. The lower slopes of its bare hills, especially when built up in terraces, can be made to yield those staple products that were admitted to be indispensable by the swaggering youth of Athens in their jingoistic oath 'that they would acknowledge no bounds to their empire but the boundaries of wheat, vine and olive'.

The inhabitants of this region, whom the Romans designated 'Greeks' (*Graeci* or *Graii*), thought of themselves as one people, the *Hellenes*, all foreigners being *Barbarians*. They were united, as Herodotus says, by 'their Hellenic kinship of blood and speech, common shrines and sacrifices of the gods and common standards of behaviour'.<sup>2</sup> Let us consider these four bonds separately.

<sup>1</sup> Plato is an exception in sometimes striking a very Hebraic note. In *Laws* iv, 716, when considering 'what conduct is dear and companionable to God', he states: 'With God goes ever Right, she that exacts retribution from such as fall short of the Divine Law; and with her goes every man who will find blessedness, humble and submissive.'

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Plato: *Laws* iv, 708: 'For the fact of being one race, of like speech and laws [or 'customs'], with community of religious rites and such things, imparts a mutual friendliness.'

(i) *The Bond of Race*

The Greeks themselves were well aware that their kinship of blood was largely mythical. The tradition of early migrations and intermixtures is summarized in a very scientific spirit by Thucydides:

'It seems that in the old days what is now called Hellas was not a land of permanent settlements but of shifting populations, continually driven from their homes by stress of greater numbers. There was no trade, nor assured intercourse by land or sea, and no surplus wealth. Men won a bare living from their own land. They did not even plant trees, not knowing when some stranger might come and oust them, especially as they were not defended by walls. Thus they were always ready to move on, confident that they could get enough anywhere for their daily needs. Hence they developed no populous cities or high material culture. The best lands changed their inhabitants most. . . . Attica, whose poor soil did not provoke rivalry or invasion, was always inhabited by the same people. . . . The various peoples were called by different names, such as *Pelasgians*, till the time when Hellen and his sons became a power in Phthiotis and were called in to the aid of other states. . . . Homer uses the word *Hellene* only of the followers of Achilles from Phthiotis; he does not use the word *Barbarians*, presumably because he has not yet distinguished the Hellenes by a single contrasting name.' (i, 2-3.)

It is now known that immigrants must have come from much further afield than Phthiotis (in northern Greece), and the migrations were probably quite as complex as Thucydides suggests. From the scanty skeletal remains, the earliest inhabitants seem to have been predominantly 'Alpines'; but a more 'Mediterranean' element was introduced at least as early as 2000 B.C., when Minoan settlements were established on the coast. It was probably about this time at latest that invaders from the Danube valley, who may have included a 'Nordic' strain, introduced into Greece that Aryan dialect that developed into a more adequate means of expressing human thought than any known before.

Hesiod, writing when the turmoil of the Migrations had not long subsided, says that the world (as known to him) had been inhabited successively by five races—the Races of Gold, Silver and Bronze, the Heroes or Demigods and the Race of Iron, among whom he had the misfortune to live. The peaceful Ages of Gold and Silver look like myth, though they may enshrine a memory of Minoan civilization. Archaeology has revealed clear traces of the third race, who fought and wrought with bronze, 'for black iron was not'. After the destruction of Knossos (c. 1400 B.C.?) many features of Minoan civilization were preserved at mainland sites, especially Mycenae; but the Bronze Men of the 'Mycenaean Age' were evidently Northerners. Their palaces were modelled not on the Cretan *labyrinth* but on the fire-halls of northern saga. These rectangular buildings, with galleries resting on colonnades of tree-trunks, must have been evolved in forest country. In Greece they were reproduced in stone, at first as dwellings for an earthly ruler, later for the city's gods.<sup>1</sup> The Heroes, who break the sequence of declining metals, seem to have been a new set of conquerors—the *Achaians* of Homer and of Hittite and Egyptian records, which have confirmed the legends of far-flung piratical ventures in the 13th Century. But these supermen fell in battle, 'some before Seven-Gated Thebes and some having crossed the sea to Troy in quest of fair-haired Helen'. The transition to the Iron Age roughly coincides with the rise of a new dominant race, the *Dorians* (11th Century B.C.). Thenceforward for many centuries the tide of migration set the other way: foreigners entered Greece only as traders or slaves.

<sup>1</sup> Greek temple architecture was also influenced to some extent by Egyptian models.

(ii) *The Bond of Speech*

Even in Classical Greece there were isolated communities (*Pelasgians, True Cretans*, etc.) who spoke languages of their own. And undoubted Hellenes must often have had difficulty in understanding each other, owing to the extreme diversity of dialects. On the whole, the primitive Aryan speech was best preserved by the Dorians. Foreign (Minoan?) influence is most obvious in the closely related dialects spoken by the people of Attica (who claimed to be Sons of the Soil) and by their kinsfolk who crossed the Aegean at the time of the Dorian migration and formed the *Ionian* settlements in Asia Minor. As the old tribal divisions gave place to city-states, the tribal dialects became subdivided. Cultural unity was saved only by artificial literary dialects, which achieved a wide currency. The first was the Epic Dialect, created by the Ionian bards and their northern neighbours the *Aeolians*, whose poetic tradition culminated in those two masterpieces that stand at the threshold of European literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The old belief that these were the work of one poet, Homer, who lived c. 800 B.C., has run the gauntlet of much scholarly criticism; the modern tendency has been to reinstate Homer as a real man and the author at least of the *Iliad*, though probably not quite in its present form. At any rate, the Homeric poems soon became 'the Bible of the Greeks' and provided Hellas with a common means of expression, a common outlook and a common stock of ideas and examples almost as significant as the Hebrew *Torah*. Later the dialect of Attica established itself as the language of literary prose and of commerce and (in a modified form) ended by ousting the local dialects altogether.

(iii) *The Bond of Religion*

The religious tie consisted in 'common shrines and sacrifices', as Herodotus says, rather than in a common faith. The Greek religion was never formulated as a body of doctrines, except perhaps in its very last days in opposition to Christianity. Archaeology has shown that many sacred sites in Hellas, like the 'high places' of Canaan, have been places of worship from prehistoric times. To the peasant who performed the age-old rites, it mattered little whether the object of his worship was an impersonal force, a highly personal deity (the corn goddess *Demeter* or the wine god *Dionysus*) or a Christian saint (*Demetrius* or *Dionysius*). Many Greek myths are almost as old as the rites—fragments of that primitive theology that crops up all the world over. But there may well be some truth in Herodotus' assertion that 'Hesiod and Homer made the generations of the gods and gave them their names and distinguished their offices and functions and described their appearance'. At any rate, the divine family who direct the affairs of men from the snowy heights of Olympus are manifestly an artificial collection—a job lot of local or tribal deities united under the headship of *Zeus*, the Aryan Sky-father, as their worshippers were united for a brief spell under Agamemnon lord of Mycenae, the conqueror of Troy. Homer's artistry has made of them a community no less living and individualized than his human Heroes and Heroines and a shade lower in their moral standards. He treats them with that mixture of humorous disrespect and punctilious piety that became typical of pagan Greece. It is hard to believe that even the Achaian swashbucklers were content with this lighthearted creed, and certainly the Classical Greeks never were.

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, which is an explicit attempt to bring order and political organization into the supernatural kingdom, the divine figures are more barbarous and elemental than Homer's joyous and irresponsible Olympians and at the same time more moral—less like human personalities and more like the beings whom men have actually worshipped in most ages. In trying to systematize the jungle growths of mythology, Hesiod has taken the first step towards rationalization

and allegory. When he introduces such abstractions as *Chaos* and *Eros* ('Love') into the story of the Creation, we see the Greek mind already struggling to turn religion into philosophy.

In the developed philosophies of Classical Greece, the Olympian gods were discarded or reduced to symbols or figureheads. Their function became mainly ornamental, but none the less important. They thronged wayside and marketplace with marble figures of ideal beauty. They embellished household pots and jars with lively and fanciful scenes. They embroidered song and story with a picturesque symbolism of Muses, Nymphs and Satyrs for which modern poets have found no effective substitute. They enriched social and political life with a soul-stirring pageantry whose lack is sadly apparent in our drab parliamentary democracies. No normal citizen was likely to shirk his share in the public festivals in honour of *Pallas Athené* at Athens or *Hera*, the consort of *Zeus*, at Argos—not only because they were jolly, sociable events, generally including a procession, a dance and a banquet, but because they invested with dignity and glamour the duties and privileges of citizenship.

Every Greek temple was thus a focus of national culture. Many specialized, more or less accidentally, in the development of particular arts. Round the worship of *Aesculapius* at Cos grew up a brotherhood of miracle-workers who became the first scientific physicians. Round the worship of *Dionysus* at Athens grew up a company of mummers who passed from dramatizing the ritual cult of the god to creating the world's profoundest tragedy and most uproarious comedy. Round the worship of *Apollo* at Delphi grew up an international bureau in which oracles delivered by an inspired but inarticulate priestess were interpreted into sound and well-informed advice (erring sometimes on the side of caution and ambiguity) on knotty points of legislation or diplomacy or the choice of a site for colonization. Round the worship of *Zeus* at Olympia grew up a four-yearly festival (first instituted in 776 B.C.) at which athletes from every state of the Greek world competed to promote the typically Greek cult of physical beauty and health.

The dazzling supermen of Olympus, who played such an active part in Greek life, cannot have been without influence on Greek thought, however lightly they may have been regarded. At the back of his mind even the sceptic had the feeling that the powers who ruled the universe, if they were not much better or wiser than himself, were not appreciably worse: however wanton and capricious, they were neither savage implacable tyrants nor blind incomprehensible forces. Their altars were seldom, if ever, stained with the blood of human victims. They called none to martyrdom for their sake, and sent none to his death for heresy or unbelief—even Socrates is not really an exception. Their priests were respected public functionaries, not witch-doctors in dangerous communion with uncanny powers. They offered no organized obstruction to philosophic or scientific speculation. But just because the Olympian religion was joyful and unexacting—because it generally impelled the worshipper to do something pleasant rather than unpleasant—it failed to offer much comfort to the weary and heaven-laden. The thoughtful pagan was not terrified by life, as some savages are, but he was often saddened by it. Time and again, beneath the gallant eager surface of Greek literature, we catch an echo of those words of Homer:

'For there is nothing more pitiable than man of all things that move and breathe on earth.' (*Iliad* xvii, 446-447.)

The bulk of the Greek people found their spiritual needs unsatisfied by cold philosophy or the warmth and colour of the state religion. The countryfolk clung still to the old fertility cults with their atmosphere of secrecy and magic and

their vaguely exciting appeal to the mystic element in human nature. Their groping in the darkness for something they could not find in the daylight was not fiercely condemned by reformers, as in Palestine, but placidly ignored. The Olympian gods promised them no recompense hereafter for their earthly toil. Hesiod, indeed, says that Zeus assigned to the fallen Heroes a carefree existence in the Islands of the Blest. But this was not for ordinary people. Homer allots to Helen's husband Menelaus as a unique privilege an afterlife in *Elysium* (a non-Greek word, probably connected with the Canaanite myth of the Fields of El). Otherwise he knows no abode of the dead but 'the dank house of *Hades*', where the shadows of men flit and gibber in the darkness like bats: the shade of Achilles, most heroic of Heroes, would rather live on earth as serf to a portionless man than reign over all the souls of the dead. But there is some evidence that the older Aegean peoples had had glimmerings of the belief in immortality widespread in the Near East. And it never quite died out. At some ancient shrines, such as that of Demeter at Eleusis, the worshipper who took part in the celebration of certain *mysteries* was promised purification and release from the fleshly prison-house with 'sweeter hopes of eternity'. The masses in the towns sought the same salvation from one foreign god after another. In the 6th Century they flocked to the priests of the Thracian vegetation god Dionysus and his legendary prophet Orpheus, who promised them after death 'a home in the starry sky'. Six centuries later, crowds thronged Mars' Hill to listen to the 'strange doctrine' preached by Paul of Tarsus.

#### (iv) *The Bond of Behaviour*

We have seen how Moses and the Prophets, by revolutionizing the idea of God, transformed the ideal of conduct, which was always conceived as obedience to His will. In Greece also the gods were the guardians of those 'common standards of behaviour' without which no community can persist: but, as there was no such open breach with the traditional religion, moral reformers found it easier on the whole to leave religion out of their reckoning as a doubtful ally. The severance was never complete. The horror inspired by bloodshed, and other deeds that lay under the ban of ancient taboos, lingered on as a fear of divine vengeance. The gods were guarantors of oaths. Zeus in particular was protector of guests and suppliants. Hesiod speaks of 'the thirty-thousand watchers of Zeus, who walk the earth unseen, keeping ward over the judgements of mortals and their wicked deeds'. In Aeschylus 'Zeus, whoe'er he be' is a moral and spiritual power not very different from Jehovah. And many devout souls persisted, in the face of the most disreputable myths, in maintaining that the gods love and reward righteousness and punish sin.

But at the same time there was growing up a new conception of 'sin', expressed in the word *hamartia*, 'missing the mark'. Socrates' axiom that 'no one willingly sins' (or 'misses his aim') sounds less paradoxical in Greek than in English. The sinner thus conceived was not disobeying a divine ordinance: he was botching his life, making it less 'beautiful' than it might be. In philosophic language, he was failing to actualize the potential perfection of his own nature. He was a *bad* man in the same sense in which one might speak of a bad dog or a bad tool. A man who was free from deformity would not only have 'a healthy mind in a healthy body': he would be morally perfect. Homer's Heroes already had this very un-Hebraic way of looking at human nature. Their ideal man was strong, handsome, brave, generous, courteous, honourable. His knightly honour was enhanced rather than diminished by a touch of that wiliness that won undying fame for Odysseus and obviously made him a *better* warrior. Their ideal woman was not only beautiful and chaste, but plentifully endowed, like Penelope, with good sense.

This heroic ideal was by no means unique. We have seen something very like it in Vedic India. But it is distinctive of the Greeks that they chose to refine and diversify it without setting up in opposition some narrower and more exacting ideal, such as that of the Hindu ascetic or the Hebrew man of God. However diverse the shapes into which they twisted it, they did not destroy the moral unity of Hellas. Even in democratic Athens, with its strong civic sense, the customary 'standards of behaviour' were modifications of the same ideal—aristocratic, individualistic, unmistakably Hellenic.

### *The World of Homer*

Apart from stray fragments, the only extant Greek writings earlier than the 5th Century are the poems attributed to Homer and Hesiod (whom it is simpler to accept provisionally as individual poets).

Suppose that we had no picture of English society before the 19th Century except that presented by Shakespeare's historical plays. We should be at a loss to know just what they were a picture of. We might suspect that the central events belonged to one age, the philosophy of life to quite another: that Hotspur and Glendower were reconstructions of historical characters, whereas Falstaff and Shallow were caricatured from the life. Yet the combined picture is solid and alive, and nothing could better illustrate certain essential qualities of English civilization. Equally artificial, and equally real and illuminating, is the world of Homer. Whatever city of Aeolis or Ionia may have cradled him, it was sundered from the world of the Achaian heroes not only by the 'shadowy mountains and the sounding sea' that parted Troy from Achilles' home in Phthiotis, but by a social upheaval not unlike that through which England had passed in the 200 years between Henry IV and Shakespeare. To us the Heroic Age appears as a tumultuous epilogue to Minoan and Mycenaean civilization, when its hoarded capital was being squandered by ignorant irresponsible barbarians who boasted no prouder title than 'sacker of cities'. In the settlements east of the Aegean we hail the rising walls of a new civilization, of which Homer was himself the master-builder. But it is hardly likely that Homer himself was conscious of any such cleavage. He must have known (unless our reckonings are seriously at fault) that the catalogues of Achaian and Trojan allies which are inserted in the *Iliad* describe an ancient political grouping, prior to the rise of the Dorians and the settlements in Asia: probably he emphasized and exaggerated the vanished unity of Hellas for propaganda purposes. He presumably used the new *alphabet* (which seems to be based on the Phoenician characters current about 900 B.C.); but, in his only reference to writing, he mentions a tablet covered with 'deadly signs' as though it were a form of black magic—perhaps a memory of Minoan writing preserved by a few wise men but a mystery to the barbarian rulers. In his similes and asides he alludes freely to iron, but he is careful to make his heroes fight with bronze. Their hearty meals of meat contrast strangely with the abstemious vegetarian and fish diet of Classical Greece. Their strong-minded womenfolk (who set a precedent for the heroines of Athenian tragedy) contrast no less strikingly with the cloistered housewives whom Plato describes as dreading nothing so much as being dragged out into the light. Altogether, it is likely that Homer (like Shakespeare) consciously tried to describe an antiquated order of things—though we cannot be sure how far he succeeded.

In so doing, the poet was not so much recreating the past as reproducing the continuous tradition that he inherited from the Achaian minstrels together with his artificial poetic vocabulary, his stock epithets and phrases and probably entire passages of verse. And the noble patrons who had kept the art alive were also linked by a continuity of sentiment and even of lineage with the ancient heroes—at Ionian Ephesus as late as Roman times there were titular 'kings' who

claimed descent from Homer's Nestor, as the noblest pedigrees of modern Europe go back to successful filibusters of a later Age of Migrations. If an industrial and political revolution was going on before the poet's eyes and new-rich bourgeois were ousting the old nobility, it cannot be supposed that he would realize the permanent importance of these unwelcome developments. Even in his lifetime he may have declaimed his romantic tales of high-born warriors to prosaic middle-class audiences, such as relished them long after his death.

In the poems themselves the chief actors are 'kings'. We almost forget the existence of the common herd—serfs and farm-hands in peace, an ill-armed rabble in war, which they loathed as much as their betters enjoyed it. When the besiegers of Troy hold a council of war, the pacifist case is put by Thersites, 'the ugliest man in the army, bandy-legged, lame of one foot, with narrow shoulders, a high-peaked skull, a thin stubble of hair and a scolding tongue'. This ignoble demagogue is silenced by a blow from Odysseus' staff and the argument that he is of no use as a fighting man—he was some centuries ahead of his time. The highest virtue of a commoner is to be a faithful retainer, such as Eumacus the swincherd; and even he is made interesting by a romantic tale of his royal birth.

The Homeric 'kings', however, bear less resemblance to Oriental despots than to country squires. One was 'kinger' than another, and Agamemnon, the 'kingest' of all, was a very limited monarch: Zeus had given him a sceptre and judgements and made him a shepherd of men that he might guide them by his *counsel*, not his commands.<sup>1</sup> Odysseus, chief of the many kings of Ithaca, is as adept with axe and plough as his queen with distaff and shuttle. Nausicaa washes the family linen; yet her father is first among the wealthy merchant princes of Phaeacia, and in this fairy-tale country we meet a more splendid civilization than anywhere else in Homer—a memory perhaps of the glories of Knossos or Mycenae, eked out with contemporary touches from Ionia or the East. Elsewhere everything suggests a rustic simplicity and a low standard of living. 'Cities' were as plentiful as 'kings', but they seem to have been shelters for the peasants against marauders rather than centres of industrial and commercial life or political organization. Almost all men lived on the land—normally their allotted portion of the tribal or family territory. For the 'outcast bereft of his due', who is 'clanless, rightless, hearthless', there is little opening except as a retainer of some great lord 'of many lots' or an adventurer on the high seas; Odysseus, in one of his many disguises, professes to have been such an adventurer, a Cretan bastard who tried to make good by leading a viking raid on Egypt. Alternatively, he might become one of the small class of 'public workmen, whom men invite from elsewhere, a diviner or a healer of ills, a shaper of wood or a holy minstrel'. The architects and sculptors of later Greece are as unknown yet as the philosophers. Even in such crafts as metalwork, the masterpieces are the work of gods, not of men—at any rate, not of 'such men as are nowadays'. This surely means that they were heirlooms from Mycenaean times. Most famous of all was the shield wrought for Achilles by the smith-god *Hephaistos*; and it is the scenes described as inlaid on this shield (by a Minoan technique) that give us our liveliest portrait of the Homeric world. As clearly as in an Egyptian tomb-painting, we see the familiar incidents of city life: the women watching from their doors while a torch-lit bridal procession goes by with song and dance and the music of flute and lyre; the circle of elders seated on polished stones in the market-place to settle some burning question of compensation for bloodshed; the approach of a band of raiders, bent on pillage or destruction, that spurs the menfolk to a desperate sortie while the women and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristotle (*Politics*, iii, 1285b): 'The monarchy of the heroic ages was exercised over willing subjects and restricted to certain functions: the king was a military commander and a judge and the regulator of religion.'

children watch from the walls. The economic life of the community is lived outside the walls: ploughmen, harvesters and vintagers go gaily about their work with music and feasting, while the king looks on 'glad at heart'.

Though Homer depicts a civilization that is primitive in its material resources, he betrays no trace of that outlook on life that we have come to associate with 'primitive man'. Apart from the travellers' tales in the *Odyssey*, which belong to an intentionally fantastic world, he gives scarcely a hint of those magical or superstitious practices that play so large a part in all the arts of the savage—agriculture, ship-building, medicine, war. He knows of diviners, but approves Hector's assertion that 'the best of omens is to fight for the fatherland'. This contempt for taboos is typical of victorious warriors, who in defeating the magic of their enemies have lost faith in their own. But Homer writes in a more reflective, as well as a kindlier, spirit than we could expect to find among his strenuous, simple-hearted, war-hardened heroes. This spirit, which he must have caught in the Ionia of his own day and which he strengthened for all time, is the spirit of Hellas—indeed of Europe. We may call it humanism, or rationalism—the recognition that man is matched against tremendous forces, a fatality stronger than all the gods, and the faith that they are to be met not by subterfuge or self-abasement but by reason and courage. He holds that 'men, by their folly, bring many troubles on themselves in addition to their allotted portion.' He portrays his chosen hero Achilles, in accordance with Aristotle's definition of tragedy, as 'a just man contending with adversity', facing his foreknown end with the defiant resignation of Job.

Thou too friend shalt die    What cause hast thou for repining?  
 Did not Patroclus die, who was so many times thy better?  
 Me too seest thou not, how that I am comely and stalwart?  
 Good was the sire who begot me, the mother who bare me a goddess.  
 Yet for me death not less and o'ermastering destiny waiteth.  
 Truly the morn shall be or the eventide or the noonday  
 When my life as thine some hand shall take in the mellay,  
 Or with a swift-flung spear or a shaft let fly from the bowstring.  
(*Iliad* xxi, 106-113)

### *The World of Hesiod*

It was probably some time in the 8th Century, perhaps about the same time as the Word of the Lord came to the shepherd Amos, that the Muses spoke to Hesiod as he herded his father's sheep on the stony slopes of Helicon in an out-of-the-way corner of Boeotia, proverbially the most backward and boorish district of Greece. He grew up a peasant, and a poor one; for his brother defrauded him of his share of their little patrimony. His poem *Works and Days* thus affords a unique glimpse of the ancient world from the point of view of the largest class of the population. He drew his inspiration, however, from a wider cultural background than fell to the average peasant. His father had lived for a time at Kymé in Asia Minor, a pioneer city of the new civilization, where minstrels declaimed in the market-place the still recent poems of Homer or new versions, in the Homeric manner, of legends the Master had left unsung. Literary prose was unknown, and unsuited to an age when men memorized readily by ear but few could read. So Hesiod used the vehicle of epic verse to tell his fellow peasants the things he thought it good for them to know: enough astronomy and nature lore to guide them to the right seasons for their yearly tasks; some practical hints (not unmixed with simple magic) on how best to get through those tasks and make both ends meet; and some shrewd maxims for the conduct of life in general.

Hē sees life as a grim and unrelenting struggle with hunger. Even on a biting winter's day, when the wild things slink shivering through the underbrush, there is work to be done. It is good to be neighbourly, but men must resist the



temptation to loiter gossiping in the warmth of the smithy. The three necessities of life are a house, a wife and an ox; Hesiod does not hold with women, but he recognizes their value as domestic animals, and he speaks with fatherly affection of a little girl. Children too are a luxury: it is not wise to have more than one son, unless by a long and industrious life you can bring under tillage a plot that will bear splitting. You may indeed try to eke out the fruits of your husbandry by 'uncomfortable sea-faring': Hesiod teaches his listeners how to know the brief sailing season in summer, but warns them against this treacherous road to riches.

This drab stark round of toil looks on the face of it very far from the light-hearted world of Homer. No doubt life in Boeotia really was ruder and poorer than in Ionia. But after all is Hesiod's world very different from that depicted on the Shield of Achilles—except that it is the other side of the shield? At Homer's harvest, while the king looked on 'glad at heart', the reapers might indulge in rustic merrymaking; but they had to face the same yearly battle with starvation. The elders who sat as judges in the market-place may have been no more incorruptible than the 'gift-devouring kings' whose crooked judgements robbed Hesiod of his due. And his life had its consolations. He has not only the poet's eye for beauty in the landscape and the changing seasons, but the peasant's friendly interest in the beasts of byre and wood and the sturdy peasant philosophy of a Sancho Pansa. He has the comforting conviction that in the long run honesty is the best policy. Zeus looks after the righteous. Retribution awaits the covetous, who forget that 'the half is more than the whole'. And yet, for all his deep religious faith (still more striking if he is the author of the *Theogony*), when Hesiod looks about him in this Iron Age, he sees little but greed and envy and backbiting. Two saving forces remain, *Aidōs* and *Nemesis*, familiar in Homer as the checks imposed on conduct by a man's own feelings and those of others; they may be rendered 'Compunction' and 'Indignation', or 'Self-respect' and 'Public Opinion'. But Hesiod looks forward to a darker time (like Amos' 'Day of the Lord').

Then from the wide-wayed earth, up, up to the heights of Olympus,  
Gleaming in snow-white robes, will hasten to join the immortals  
Aidos and Nemesis, and leave mankind without comfort.  
Bitter their woes will be, and the evil will know no healing  
(*Works and Days*, 197-201.)

The poet underrated, as others have done since, the power of these two goddesses. In the next two centuries they built in this land of overweening lords and overworked peasants, so like their counterparts the world over, a new creation which the Greeks called the 'city' (*polis*). A host of cities sprang up, embodying the new ideal of citizenship in such individual guises that historians may be forgiven for speaking of them almost as though they were persons. Only a few samples, better known than the rest, can claim a place in our survey.

### *The Settlements in Asia*

The originators of the city-state and its civilization were the Aeolian and Ionian refugees who settled, from the 11th Century onwards, on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor and in the neighbouring islands. Their early history is very obscure. Even legends are scarce. Archaeological data are still meagre; but they suffice to show that here, as well as in European Greece, material prosperity and artistic skill were for some time on a lower level than in the Mycenaean palaces. The energies of the settlers were spent in strenuous readjustment to a new environment and in struggles with the Asiatic peoples, which gave point to the minstrels' lays of a glorious past in which all Hellenes had united to defeat the Barbarian. As in the pioneer settlements of America or Australia, national and class distinctions

lost their rigidity. The ancient tribal organization was broken down by inter-marriage with colonists of foreign origin or non-Greek 'natives'. Chieftains (or 'kings') of ancient lineage, reinforced by vigorous personalities from among the commoners, maintained for a time a certain prestige, supported by the lion's share of the land. But new factors threatened both their military and their economic supremacy.

Battles were no longer decided, as in the *Iliad*, by duels between expensively armed champions who drove to the field in horse-drawn chariots. The new weapons, made of iron, were relatively cheap. And in Asia the Greeks learnt a new style of fighting, ultimately of Sumerian origin, in which the issue was determined by packed masses of disciplined spearmen, recruited from the more prosperous members of the peasantry. If some Thersites chose to voice the views of this yeoman class at an assembly of warriors, it was no longer easy for his betters to silence him. In some parts of Greece, especially in the wide plains of Thessaly and semi-barbarian Macedonia, the nobles held their own by becoming 'knights'—i.e. by using the new invention of cavalry, which was made possible by an improvement in the breed of horses. But the settlers in Asia never went in seriously for horsebreeding, mainly no doubt because they were handicapped by a shortage of land. They failed to gain a footing more than a few miles inland, especially after the Barbarians had become consolidated in strong kingdoms such as Phrygia and Lydia.

Confined like the Phoenicians to a narrow strip of coast, the Greeks began to utilize their position in the same way, by acting as carriers for the exports and imports of their wealthy neighbours of the interior. Early in the 6th Century, if not before, this commerce was lubricated by the invention of coined money.<sup>1</sup> But long before this the merchant class had begun to eclipse the already waning power of the landed aristocracy.

Even in the 9th Century this social revolution had probably advanced much further than appears in the backward-looking Homeric poetry, in which we have found more evidence of the accompanying intellectual revolution. A little later, perhaps about the time of Hesiod, we catch a glimpse of the lighter side of Ionian life in the *Hymn to Apollo* by the blind bard of Chios whom later tradition identified with Homer himself.

But above all lands, Phoebus, thy heart rejoiceth in Delos;  
Thither the trailing-robed Ionians gather to praise thee,  
They and their children and wives revered; with boxing and dancing  
And with song competing, they worship thee and rejoice thee.  
Truly a man might deem they were deathless and ageless ever  
Who should behold the Ionians then, when all are assembled,  
Marking the charm of them all; and his heart would be lightened within him,  
Gazing upon the men and upon the fair-girdled women,  
And on the swift-prowed ships and on all their wealth of possessions (146-155)

Here was a society more peace-loving than Homer's, more leisurely and refined than Hesiod's, and without his horror of the sea.

To the venturesome the sea offered a way not only to riches but to a more spacious home than the cramped quarters on the Aegean seaboard. So, following another Phoenician precedent, the Greeks began to plant a fringe of colonies far and wide round the shores of Europe, Asia and Africa. Where their Phoenician rivals had generally been content with trading stations, the Greeks settled on the land, and the new colonies became the homes of vigorous peasant populations. Before 750 B.C., emigrants from Aeolic Kymé founded a new Kymé (Cumae) in Italy. \* Ionians from Phocaea settled as far afield as Marseilles, and others from

<sup>1</sup> The earliest datable coins are those of Alyattes, king of Lydia (died 560 B.C.); but the example had probably been set by his predecessors, and coins issued by some of the Greek cities of Asia may have been even earlier.

Miletus at a chain of sites round the Black Sea. In Egypt, Ionian traders were encouraged to form an emporium at Naucratis, a forerunner of the European 'factories' in India and 'treaty-ports' in China. The Greeks were thus (exceptionally) brought into contact with a wide range of alien cultures without losing their own national consciousness and institutions. By the end of the 6th Century, when the colonizing movement subsided, they were established 'all round the shores of the Inner Sea from the Phasis to the Pillars of Hercules [Caucasus to Gibraltar] like frogs round a marsh'.<sup>1</sup> And they made just as much noise, for they were already 'the most talkative of mankind', busily developing the art of talk not only as a means of intercourse and expression but as a guide to hidden realities and an instrument of government.

Greek colonization was something between random migration and calculated imperialism. The colonists knew where they were going (often they had sought the advice of Apollo's travel bureau at Delphi) and they remained bound to the 'mother city' (*mētropolis*) by ties of interest and sentiment: if they launched colonies of their own, they were expected to send home for fire from the ancestral hearth and for a 'founder'. But they were politically independent. Where the governing class encouraged colonization, it was not normally with any thought of territorial aggrandizement but as a means of opening up new markets and getting rid of turbulent spirits who might have made trouble at home. The 'founder' was often some adventurous younger son or bastard of the nobility. He enjoyed, if not despotic power, a position of great dignity, and might aspire after death to semi-divine honours as a 'hero'.

The explosive vitality (reminiscent of Elizabethan England) that prompted such far-reaching enterprises is personified in Archilochus of Paros. His poems provoked the Athenian aristocrat Critias to this indignant outburst:

'Archilochus was no good witness in his own cause to leave such a reputation behind him. For, if he had not told us so himself, we should never have known that he was a son of the slave woman Enipo; that he was driven by poverty and want to leave Paros and went to Thasos; that, having come there, he quarrelled with the inhabitants; that he used to revile his friends and his enemies with equal gusto; that he was wanton and a man of violence; and, most shameful of all, that he threw away his shield.'

The few surviving scraps of his poetry help us to see the picture in a kindlier light. He was evidently a born rebel, who felt he owed nothing to society and boasted defiantly of his base birth and his struggles with poverty. He hoped for better prospects in the colony of Thasos, but he found the island 'a donkey's spine, bristly with wild scrub'. He 'quarrelled with the inhabitants' (probably lampooned those in authority) and began to knock about the world as a mercenary—his spear was 'bread, wine and a couch'. He lost his heart to the fair Neobulé.

With a myrtle sprig she played  
And a rosebud fair,  
Back and shoulders touched with shade  
By her tumbling hair.

When her father refused him her hand, he cursed them both in such venomous verse that (according to tradition) they were driven to death—the 'holy minstrel' was still something of a magician. The wanderer's life was full of perils.

Glaucus, look, the deep is heaving; Gyrae's crag the clouds enscreen,  
Sign of tempest. Terror nears us, offspring of the unforeseen.

<sup>1</sup> Plato: *Phaedo*, 109. Cf. Strabo, iii, 4 (19).

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With a myrtle sprig she played  
And a rosebud fair,  
Back and shoulders touched with shade  
By her tumbling hair.

When her father refused him her hand, he cursed them both in such venomous verse that (according to tradition) they were driven to death—the 'holy minstrel' was still something of a magician. The wanderer's life was full of perils.

Glaucus, look, the deep is heaving; Gyrae's crag the clouds enscreen,  
Sign of tempest. Terror nears us, offspring of the unforeseen.

<sup>1</sup> Plato: *Phaedo*, 109. Cf. Strabo, iii, 4 (19).

But there is always wine to cheer us—Dionysus be praised! 'Make haste there and pass the wine-skin round the rowers' benches!' The gods send now good fortune and now ill. One day you win a battle, another you lose. And if you *do* throw your shield into a bush and take to your heels, what matter? 'Let it go hang! I will buy another just as good.' Therefore, be still, my heart! Take things as they come. At the worst, 'even for ills incurable the gods have assigned a remedy—endurance'. You never know what the morrow may bring forth. Did not Zeus hide the sun at noon and strike terror into men? After that it would not be surprising if dolphins were to climb the hills and woodland beasts took to splashing in the noisy waves. Incidentally, this reference to an eclipse, usually identified with that of 6 April 648 B.C., gives us our first exact date in the history of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Archilochus writes in the Homeric manner (or sometimes a burlesque of it) not about the heroes of old, but about his contemporaries and above all about himself. He is a pioneer of the poetry of self-expression, which culminates a generation later in the impassioned lyrics of the Lesbians, Alcaeus and Sappho. This was not exactly a new thing. The savage often sings of his own loves and hates as passionately as Archilochus. But civilized societies had held together largely by swamping the individual. Now he is becoming dangerously aware of his own importance and contemptuous of the conventions that bind him to the herd.

Archilochus had been a lone rebel against society. Alcaeus voices the prejudices of the old order in a society which the rising waves of rebellion threatened to capsize.

What may the strife of the stormwinds mean?  
For one wave to starboard  
Upheaves, one to larboard,  
And we in the black ship plunge between.

Where the aristocracy of landlords had been changing more or less peaceably into an aristocracy of merchant princes, the pace of revolution was now beginning to quicken. The Greeks had ceased to be mere go-betweens and begun to manufacture pottery, metalwork, woven stuffs and other goods on a large scale for export. The artisan class was growing richer than in any previous community, and intelligent and wide-awake individuals were putting forward a demand new in human history since the beginnings of civilization—a demand that an effective share in government should fall to the largest class of the population. An assembly of all the free adult males was to meet at intervals to decide important questions by majority vote and to elect a council to carry on the permanent government. We cannot trace the stages by which the Greeks arrived at this notion of government by majority vote, which they called *democracy* (government by the *demos* or common people), but its historical importance needs no stressing. At the time, when the populace had not yet learnt the new disciplines and loyalties that must accompany freedom, the demand was violently made and violently met. Men like Alcaeus could only see that the leisured society they knew, with its fine traditions and delicate appreciation of beauty, was threatened by a base-born rabble, the dupes of self-seeking agitators. Individual demagogues might perish. 'Now let us all get gloriously drunk,' cries Alcaeus, 'for Myrsilus is dead!' But the power behind them was hard to resist.

The transition was seldom accomplished without wholesale banishments and massacres by both sides in turn. Generally the strong hand of an autocrat was needed to restore order. Sometimes both parties agreed to hand over the government for a term of years to an arbiter. More often some exploiter of

<sup>1</sup> The recent suggestion that the eclipse was in fact that of 14 March 711 B.C. at least illustrates the shakiness of Greek chronology before the 5th Century.

popular grievances (a renegade nobleman, as like as not) contrived to win power by demagogic arts and retain it with the aid of a mercenary bodyguard. These men were called by a foreign (probably Lydian) name, *tyrants*. Recent events have made it easier to believe the stock tales of their initial bids for popular favour, their lavish expenditure on temples and aqueducts, their patronage of the arts, the tangled intrigues and mutual alliances that furthered their ambitious foreign policies, and their change under the influence of fear and suspicion into monsters of treachery and barbarity. Not one of them founded a lasting dynasty. 'Thou shalt reign,' said the Delphic oracle to the tyrant of Corinth, 'thyself and thy sons, but thy sons' sons no longer.' And it was a fairly safe prophecy. Tyranny did not always give place to democracy: often the outcome was a more up-to-date and efficient oligarchy, and only too often a precarious oscillation of power between 'the many' and 'the few'. Even in the most democratic states the franchise was never extended to women and slaves. In the most highly industrialized states, slaves purchased from Barbarian countries became a large class, even outnumbering the free citizens. They were a form of capital investment that gave good returns, and they played the part in economic life that is now taken by machines. If we may judge by Athens, they were not as a rule badly treated. But the existence of this class was a big price to pay for leisure, liberty and culture—in the long run, perhaps, a bigger price than the community could afford to pay.

We do not know how soon or how fully any Greek city of Asia created the political machinery and the civic spirit essential to democracy. An inscription found at Chios suggests that a democratic constitution was functioning there before 600 B.C., and it was probably not unique.<sup>1</sup> A little later we are surprised to learn from another inscription that progressive Miletus still had that old-fashioned institution, a king. But evidently he was a king only in name, preserving ancient religious functions; for the inscription states: 'At these sacrifices the King is present, but receives no more than a member of the choir.' At this crucial stage the political development of the Asiatic Greeks was cut short by foreign conquerors—Alyattes and Croesus of Lydia and later Cyrus the Persian. This foreign rule, as in Jerusalem, was not oppressively exercised. The Great King was content that his Greek tributaries should govern themselves. But he preferred that their government should be a *tyranny*: despotism was a thing he knew and understood. Whether or not by the deliberate policy of the overlord, free institutions were certainly dying out at the end of the 6th Century, and with them that freedom of thought whose most striking products we have yet to consider.

The men who had approached political problems in a spirit of free enquiry, summoning their most time-honoured institutions to account at the bar of reason, had been working an even greater revolution in the world of ideas. The eclipse of 648 had suggested to Archilochus that the universe, like human society, was slipping into chaos. But an eclipse in 585 was predicted by Thales of Miletus as one of the uniformly recurring phenomena of nature. Men were discovering in nature the law and order they were trying to establish in the state. Thales left a great reputation as 'the first man to be called wise', but there is little authentic record of his wisdom—which, like many others, he is said to have learnt from the Egyptians. His doctrine that 'water is the starting-point of everything' might in itself be no more philosophical than the Homeric myth of Ocean, 'the bounds of land and the fountainhead of gods'. But he was certainly the founder of a school of thinkers (the Ionian physicists) who tried to answer quite rationally, though on what seems to us an absurdly narrow basis of facts, the question 'What is the stuff of which the world is made?' or (more simply) 'What is?' Thales may have chosen water because it is potentially solid, liquid or vapour, or (as Aristotle suggests) because of its role in animal and vegetable life. The answer was

<sup>1</sup> It is significant that Chios was also reputed to be the first Greek city to import Barbarian slaves.

ephemeral, the question momentous. It is noteworthy that this first seeker after a unifying principle in nature deplored the political disunity of the Greeks: he proposed to the Ionian cities a scheme of federal union which might possibly have saved their civilization.

Thales' disciple Anaximander, manipulating his still scanty evidence in the light of ancient myths and fanciful mathematical analogies, arrived at something startlingly like the modern scientific conception of the universe. His map of the world provided a model for that of the geographer Hecataeus, which is derided by the much-travelled Herodotus as more symmetrical than accurate. He taught that the earth is a cylinder poised in the middle of a spherical heaven; that there are an infinite number of such heavens and earths; that life began in the water, and man evolved from a fish. He did not identify the primary stuff of things with any particular substance: it was an infinite imperishable something, out of which the worlds are formed and into which they are dissolved. There is a ceaseless strife of opposites—the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry. Now one prevails, now another: and 'they make requital and amends to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time'. This quotation shows that Anaximander saw the universe as a Greek city, torn by party struggles but kept in being by the overriding rule of law. It is significant that he wrote in prose, for whose literary use he had no model but the recent codes and constitutions of the first republics. His conception of the cyclic destruction and rebirth of worlds was shared by most Greek thinkers, who were thus prevented from believing in progress except as something restricted and transient.

Cyrus' conquest of Ionia in 546 B.C. prompted a new stream of emigrants to seek their fortunes out west, in the Greater Greece that was growing up round the shores of Italy. Among them were two men, Xenophanes and Pythagoras, whose teachings reflect the first phase in the long battle between science and religion. The Ionian physicists had not deliberately attacked religion. Thales indeed had said that the world is full of gods; and Anaximander had applied this name to his successive universes. But men were beginning to realize that these 'gods' bore little resemblance to those they had been accustomed to worship. Xenophanes, in the uncompromising spirit of a Hebrew prophet, used the popular vehicle of Homeric verse to discredit the Homeric gods in the eyes of all Hellas.

Homer and Hesiod dared all deeds to the gods to attribute  
Deemed among men most shameful, adultery, theft and deception. . . .  
Men made gods in their likeness, in vesture, in voice and in aspect.  
See how the Ethiop's gods flat-nosed, black-skinned, are depicted;  
Gods blue-eyed, red-haired, are those whom the Thracian worships.  
Surely, had oxen hands, if horses and lions were artists,  
Ox-like, horse-like gods, or gods leonine they would fashion. . . .  
What men call by the name of Iris, and feign her a goddess,  
Is but a banded cloud, green-tinted, ruby and purple. . . .  
Touching the gods hath no man yet known truly, or will know;  
Yea, if he lit on the truth, he would know not; all is but fancy. . . .  
But one god there is, of gods and of men most mighty,  
All unlike mankind in form and in fashion of thinking.  
Ever unmoved he bides and goeth not hither or thither.  
All of him sees, all hears, and all of him effortless thinketh.

Like some later assailants of orthodox religion, Xenophanes used the evidence of fossils on behalf of a godless theory of the creation. As a champion of the new order in practical politics as well as in theory, he attacks another idol of the Greeks, the Olympic victor: righteousness and good laws in a city depend not on the strength of men or horses, but on the strength of good wisdom. In such words Xenophanes sets up the new ideals—and the new snobbery—of the intellectual in opposition to the old ones of the aristocratic warrior.



While Xenophanes was thus almost wholly negative and sceptical, Pythagoras was the founder of a religious movement with strongly positive rules and beliefs, which attracted many disciples. His best-known doctrine is alluded to (probably with derisive intent) by Xenophanes himself:

Once, when he heard a whipped cur yelp,  
He cried in pity: 'Hold!  
A dear friend's soul is in the whelp;  
I know that voice of old.'

With this belief 'that the soul of his grandmother might haply inhabit a bird', it is natural that Pythagoras should have been a vegetarian; but we note with surprise that this was only one of the curiously primitive taboos by which the Pythagoreans regulated their lives. This magic and asceticism, like the doctrine of transmigration itself, are so foreign to Greek thought that it has often been suggested that Pythagoras had been somehow influenced by his great contemporary Gautama Buddha. While it is pleasing to picture Ionian and Indian philosophers hobnobbing somewhere in the dominions of their common overlord the king of Persia, it is safer to suppose that there were many middlemen in this commerce of ideas. But we can hardly doubt the ancient belief that the teaching of Pythagoras, like that of 'Orpheus', owed something to that Oriental mysticism which blossomed most profusely in India.<sup>1</sup>

There was another side to Pythagoreanism, also no doubt traceable to the founder, though his actual utterances and personality are lost in a mist of legend. Initiates into the Pythagorean mysteries were required to purify themselves not only by ritual observances and abstinences but by intellectual discipline. They sought salvation in *mathematics*, a wide field of study which embraced music and astronomy. Their studies revealed in the universe the mystic *harmony* that links the notes of the octave by a mathematical formula to the length of the lyre-string and bids the stars keep time to the soundless music of the spheres: in the Pythagorean system the earth, as well as the sun, moon and planets, is a globe revolving round an unseen central fire. 'Pythagoras,' says a later Greek mathematician, 'prized the study of numbers above all things, and lifted it above the needs of the merchant.' The exact sciences of arithmetic and geometry, apart from any practical application, were beginning to captivate the human mind. Here at last was a world where reason was completely at home. If men were ever to understand the perplexing world of experience, it must surely be by relating it to this intelligible world of mathematical harmonies. It seemed that true knowledge was attainable only if (as Pythagoras taught) 'all things are numbers', or (as Sir James Jeans puts it) 'the Architect of the Universe is a mathematician'.

If this ideal *harmony* seemed sadly remote from the jarring tumult of the late 6th Century, it was comforting to hold, with Heraclitus of Ephesus, that strife itself might beget

'an unseen harmony mightier than the seen. . . . For men wot not how that which is at odds with itself agrees, a harmony of pull against pull, as of bow or lyre.' (B54, 51.)<sup>2</sup>

Heraclitus' cryptic treatise *On Nature* (c. 500 B.C.?) may not actually have been intended (as one ancient critic supposed) as an allegorical description of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Apuleius: *Florida* [2nd Century A.D.], ii, 15: 'The Brahmins contributed most to his [Pythagoras] philosophy, declaring what things teach the mind or stimulate the body; what are the parts of the soul, the cycles of life, the punishments and rewards allotted to the Departed according to their deserts.'

<sup>2</sup> The quotations from the early philosophers in this and the following chapter are taken from H. Diels: *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

political life, but its fragments clearly mirror the disruptive individualism of the Ionian cities, held together only by that vague but all-pervading force, 'the law'.

'Homer did ill to pray that strife might perish from among gods and men. He wist not that, were his prayer granted, all things would pass away. . . . War is father and king of all, making one god, another man, one slave, another free. . . . War is common to all, and strife is justice, and through strife all things come to pass.' (A22; B53, 80.)

'Awake, men have one common world; asleep, they turn aside, each into a world of his own. . . . Though reason is common to all, men live as though each had his own private intelligence. . . . Those who speak with understanding must cleave fast to what is common to all, as a city to the law, and faster yet. For all human laws are fed by the one law which is divine: it has such force as it will, and suffices for all even to overflowing. . . . The people must fight for the law as for a city wall.' (89, 2, 114, 44.)

'Much learning does not teach understanding; else had it taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus. . . . Seeing is illusion, and thinking is the holy sickness [epilepsy]. . . . One thing alone is wise, to know the intelligence that pilots all things through all.' (40, 46, 41.)

Heracleitus likens the world to an ever-flowing stream, where nothing is ever the same: 'you cannot step into the same river twice, or even once'. Its seeming continuity and stability is but that of a flame, whose matter is ever passing off as smoke and renewed by fresh fuel in a perpetual circulation.

'This self-same world of all nor god nor man made, but it was ever and is and will be, an ever-living fire, part akindling, part aquenching. . . . Fire lives the death of air, and air of fire; water lives the death of earth, and earth of water. . . . Mortals are immortals, immortals mortals, either living the others' death and dying their life. . . . The upward and the downward path are the same. . . . In the circumference of a circle beginning and end are one.' (30, 36, 62, 60, 103.)

When Heracleitus compares fire in nature to money among men as the universal medium of exchange, he is surely thinking of the solvent effect on society of that newly invented currency whose circulation sent one man on the upward, another on the downward, path.

How can we hope to read the riddle of this intangible dream-world, where change is the only form of rest, where the senses are cheats and thought (or should we say 'imagination'?) a disease, where 'time is a child playing draughts', and we ourselves 'are and are not'? Yet Heracleitus is sure that there is an intelligible something, a divine justice that will not let the sun 'overstep his measures', a god who is 'day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, plenty and dearth', who is 'willing and unwilling to be called Zeus', before whom man is but as a child or an ape, and to whose images men pray as vainly as one might talk to a house.

If it be true, as Heracleitus said, that 'character is destiny', then the destiny of Ionia is plainly to be read in the events that heralded the coming of the new century. In 499 B.C. most of the Ionian cities, led by the *tyrant* of Miletus, rose in revolt against Darius. After they had won some initial successes, a powerful Persian fleet appeared off Miletus.

• Thereupon the Ionians assembled at the island of Ladé and held a council of war. Among the speakers was Dionysius, commander of the Phocaeans, who addressed them thus:

' "Men of Ionia, our fortunes lie on a razor's edge, whether we are to be freemen or slaves—and captured runaways at that. Now, if you will put up with hardships, you will have a bad time at first, but afterwards you will be able to defeat the enemy and be free. But, if you are slack and undisciplined, I have no hope but that you will pay the penalty to the King for your revolt. Put yourselves in my hands, and I undertake, if the gods play fair, that the enemy will either not join battle or, if they do, will get much the worst of it."

'Hearing this, the Ionians put themselves in his hands. He made the ships put out every time in line, so as to train the rowers to bring one ship in between others and practise the boarders. The rest of the day he kept the ships at anchor and exercised the Ionians all day long. For seven days they did as they were bid. But the next day, being inexperienced in such exercises and wearied with their labours and the heat of the sun, they spoke among themselves thus:

' "What god have we offended that we should fulfil such a penance? We must have sailed out of our senses to put ourselves in the hands of this boaster of Phocaea, who contributes only three ships. He has taken us and racked us with incurable pains. Many of us have fallen sick, and many others are in a fair way to do likewise. Better to suffer any fate, even the threatened slavery, which is to be, rather than this one, which is now. Come, let us listen to him no longer!"

'After that no one would obey him, but they pitched tents on the island like a land force and sat about in the shade and refused to go on board or make any effort.' (Herodotus vi, 11-12.)

So the freemen of Ionia proved themselves true citizens of the inconstant world of Heracleitus. The battle, when it came, was a day of cowardice, treachery and individual heroism. It brought the most highly cultured communities of Greece more firmly than ever under the rule of 'Barbarians who discourage philosophy, gymnastics and grand passions, because it is to the interest of despots that their subjects should be mean-spirited and disunited'.<sup>1</sup> Dionysius himself, after taking three enemy ships in the battle, went off on a freebooting excursion down the coast of Phoenicia; eventually he took up the trade of a privateer in western waters, 'not molesting Greek ships, but only Carthaginians and Etruscans'.

### *The Isthmus Cities*

The forces that had hastened the first blossoming of Greek civilization in the hothouse of Ionia worked in the European homeland more slowly and fitfully and along more divergent lines. Far into Classical times the wooded glens of Arcadia housed a pastoral folk as uncouth as their shaggy deity Pan, or the Zeus of Mount Lycæus whom men worshipped with human sacrifice and cannibal feasts. But a few hours' journey away, at the 'cross-roads of Hellas', where the land route from north to south crossed the sea route from east to west, there sprang up busy communities of traders, potters and weavers who almost kept pace with the Ionians in social and political development. The class war was here complicated by real or fancied differences of race. The upstart *tyrants* of Sicyon, the first of whom is said to have been a butcher, evidently posed as champions of the down-trodden natives against the Dorian conquerors. One of them, Cleisthenes, sought to discredit the Dorian clans, who had dominated the state, by giving them insulting nicknames such as Assites and Hoggites. He replaced the cult of the local Dorian hero by dramatic choruses in honour of Dionysus. The worship of this parvenu god, who had no standing in Homer's Olympus, was encouraged by

<sup>1</sup> Plato: *Symposium*, 182.

several *tyrants* as part of a popular culture in opposition to the aristocratic ideal glorified by Homer. Cleisthenes went so far as to suppress the public recitation of the Homeric poetry altogether.

Sicyon's eastern neighbour Corinth early became so wealthy and populous that she was able to take an active part in the colonizing movement. In 734 B.C. (?) a Corinthian colony was founded at Syracuse in Sicily, soon to become the leading Greek city in the West. At this time the government of Corinth was in the hands of a single family, the Bacchiads—probably an instance of the devolution of kingship. In the 7th Century they were expelled by the *tyrant* Cypselus, traditionally the son of a Bacchiad lady who had accepted a base-born husband because she was lame. Cypselus' son Periander had the ambitious design, quite alien to the normal policy of the city-state, of organizing the Corinthian colonies into an overseas empire. His schemes to stimulate commerce included an abortive attempt to cut a canal through the Isthmus. After the fall of the tyranny Corinth came under the efficient rule of the new upper class of successful business men, like the Phoenician oligarchies of 'merchant princes'. It remained a bourgeois town, chiefly distinguished by freedom from the normal Greek prejudice against industry and trade. It was not one of those cities in which (as Xenophon tells us)

'citizens were forbidden to engage in those ungentlemanly arts that ruin men, body and soul, by keeping them seated in the shade or bowed over a fire and leaving them no leisure for social intercourse or politics.' (*The Householder*, 6.)

If we would understand the outraged feelings of the ousted nobility of land-owners, we must turn to Corinth's less prosperous rival Megara. Here the new order was less stable, and the class war raged with a bitterness that lives in the envenomed verses of Theognis.

The city is still a city, but strangers lord it here,  
Men who knew nought of right and law but laired without like deer  
And wrapped their ribs in goat-skins—these are our noble earls;  
And (Who can endure to see it?) the noble are now the churls.  
But the tricksters trick each other and mock at each other still.  
Trust not these boors who were not bred to the knowledge of good and ill!

Theognis is moved to genuine moral indignation by the decay of aristocratic standards: men are coming to value only money, which the gods may give to the wicked as readily as to the good; it even tempts some to defile noble birth by mixed marriages, a thing that would never be tolerated by a breeder of sheep or horses. But the line of conduct he prescribes for his own squire, to whom the verses are addressed, is not exactly heroic. He is to keep up a semblance of friendship with the upstarts, but to avoid real intimacy lest he be corrupted; to steer clear of politics as far as possible, and to keep to the middle of the road. Theognis is the advocate of a lost cause—and probably not as good an advocate as it deserved.

### *Sparta*

South of the Isthmus, the Dorian conquerors of Sparta, the ancient realm of Menelaus, had made good their rule over the plains of Laconia and (after a desperate struggle) Messenia. Masters of the widest ploughlands of the Peloponnese, they had less inducement than most of their brother Greeks to turn to the sea for a livelihood. Moreover, their energies were fully spent in subduing the peasant population (known as *Helots*) and holding them in sullen serfdom. The 'city' of Sparta existed materially as a cluster of straggling unwallled villages, spiritually as a community of warriors (the free citizens or *Spartiates*) on perpetual garrison duty. While they could not afford to indulge in the Ionian taste for self-expression and party politics, they had no mind to submit to a despotism of the Oriental type. With that creative adaptability which seemed to be the Hellenic birth-

right, they early evolved and rigidly maintained a nicely balanced constitution. Leadership in war, together with certain religious and judicial functions, remained the prerogative of the kings; there were always two kings at once, representatives of two rival families able to hold each other in check. Their power was further checked by a body of Elders elected for life and the Assembly of all adult male Spartiates, which met monthly to answer 'Yes' or 'No' to proposals put before it. The Assembly also elected five Overseers (*Ephors*), who held office for the year and ultimately became the real rulers of the state, at least in peace. This was acclaimed by Greek theorists as a model of the mixed constitution, combining the merits of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.

The spirit that made this constitution workable is enshrined in the stirring war songs of Tyrtæus (c. 600 B.C.). These make their appeal to a restricted and close-knit complex of ideas and emotions.

Fight, sons of the City of Heroes,  
As your fathers fought before you!  
In your left hand grasp the shield-grip,  
In your right the spear-shaft stoutly!  
Never heed if your life be forfeit,  
For that isn't the way in Sparta.

The Spartan warrior is to be no Achilles, performing prodigies of individual daring, touchy about his personal honour, more loyal to his private friends than to the common cause. He is to think of his fathers and his children and his children's children, the fellow citizens with whom he stands shoulder to shoulder in the serried phalanx, and above all of the impersonal 'city' which commands his utter allegiance. The problem of the relation of the individual to the community must always have existed; but hitherto it had everywhere been settled by customs so ingrained that no one thought of questioning their authority. As the Ionians were the first to formulate as an ideal the supremacy of the individual (an ideal which reached its climax at Lâdê), so the Spartans were the first to proclaim in set terms the supremacy of the state.

The Spartan ideal also was working towards a climax. In Tyrtæus' day the Spartan warriors were still free to cultivate the gentler arts of civilization: Sparta was famed for fair women and melodious poets, and well furnished (as recent excavations prove) with articles of luxury and display. These tastes were compelling the landed gentry of Sparta to compete as belated entrants in the race for wealth with Ionian and Corinthian merchants. Individuals might overcome the handicap, but for the class as a whole the race could end only as it had ended for the military aristocracy in other commercialized cities. We need not suppose that they were such good Marxists as to have any clear perception of this threat to their interests; probably they were more keenly aware that their ideals were challenged by the growing ease and independence of civilian life. Their reaction, however prompted, was to extend the rigours of the camp over the whole life of the community. It is doubtful how far they were innovating, and how far reinforcing work begun far back in the 8th or 9th Century by the legendary reformer Lycurgus. Some features of the Spartan rule of life may even be older still; they recur among the Dorian settlers in Crete (where they are attributed to 'Minos'), and they have interesting analogies with the age-groups and initiations of 'primitive' societies in many parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Whatever its origins, it had evolved by the 5th Century into a masterpiece of interlocking laws supposed to have been designed as a perfect whole by Lycurgus under the direct inspiration of the Delphic Apollo—much as the Jews came to believe that the entire *Torah* had been revealed to Moses. Perhaps both Spartan and Israelite law-givers deserve more credit than has commonly been allowed them by modern enthusiasts for unconscious evolution.

History presents many examples of the militarized state, from Rome to Ch'in, from Zululand to Prussia. If Sparta illustrates with unique simplicity and coherency the essential characters of the species, that may be largely because what we see is an ideal portrait painted by philosophic historians in other states. In Sparta itself there were neither philosophers nor historians.

The life of the Spartiate, we are told, was regulated by the state from birth—or even earlier, for marriage unions were enjoined or overridden in accordance with current theories of eugenics. Only the strongest children were reared at all. At the age of seven a boy was taken from his parents and assigned to a 'pack'. It is questionable whether he learnt to read or write, but his physical training was thorough and his character was shaped by rigid discipline. At 18 he entered a regiment. Till 30 he had no private life at all: though he might marry after 20, he was only allowed to pay stolen visits to his wife. At 30 he was allowed (or rather compelled) to marry and settle down, but till 60 he continued to take his meals at the common mess. The staple food was the notorious 'black broth'; a Sybarite who had tasted a spoonful remarked that it was no wonder the Spartans were glad to face death as the pleasanter alternative. Spartiate girls were brought up almost as austerely as the boys: they were simply the destined mothers of warriors. Among the young men segregated in barracks, homosexual relations were naturally frequent, and they were deliberately encouraged and romanticized as a stimulus to martial valour. Military training included service in the *Krypteia* (a sort of *Gestapo*), which involved spying on the Helots and killing off any who threatened to make trouble.

Each Spartiate possessed an inalienable patrimony tilled by Helots and adequate to supply his modest needs. Elaborate (but ultimately unavailing) safeguards were devised to prevent his acquiring wealth in excess of this. He was equally debarred from squandering it. The new-fangled invention of coinage, which had proved its solvent power in Ionia, was forbidden to circulate in Sparta; there was only a cumbersome iron currency, valueless abroad, which served for small transactions. Such commerce as there was lay in the hands of the 'Dwellers-round-about', a middle class between Spartiates and Helots. Foreigners were never welcome, and periodically any who had settled in the country were expelled.

As a product of the Greek genius, Spartan society may well rank with Ionian philosophy. Its architects built on the solid economic foundation that produced, for instance, the three social classes of Babylonia; on it they reared, not the fantastic pinnacles of the Hindu caste system, but a structure as four-square as a Doric temple and with something of the same intellectual and aesthetic appeal. Plato, who felt that appeal as strongly as any man, says that 'Lycurgus' failed because his educational methods did not aim at producing a man of all-round excellence: the Spartan excelled only in the one virtue of courage, and even his courage was 'lame in one leg', proof against pain but not against pleasure. In fact the very strength of the Spartan discipline, as a means to military success, was its undoing. Though the national ideal remained prudently isolationist, it was hard to prevent victory from leading to foreign conquest, which exposed the hardy warriors to temptations they were wholly untrained to resist. This is clearly seen by Xenophon, a blunt soldier without Plato's insight, but one who knew Sparta well and admired the Spartan ideal.

'Knowing that Sparta, one of the least populous cities in Hellas, was also the most powerful and the most renowned, I used to wonder how this could be; but having become acquainted with the Spartan way of life, I wonder no more—or rather, I wonder at Lycurgus, author of the laws in obedience to which they found happiness, and account him utterly wise.

'His ordinances are contrary to those of most other cities. . . . Instead

of sending the children to school, each under the care of his own *pedagogue* [attendant slave], to be taught letters and music and gymnastic, he put them under the care of a custodian, with power to marshal them and sternly punish slackers, aided by floggers to enforce respect and obedience. Instead of softening their feet with shoes, he hardened them by barefoot exercises. He accustomed them to wear one cloak all the year round. He assigned a ration of food that would inure them to hard living; to avert the sharpest pangs, he bade them supply their want by stealing, but any who were caught he punished as bad thieves. In the absence of their custodian, he gave power of command and punishment to any citizen present or to the leader of the boys' pack.

In adolescence, when the other Greeks dispense with *pedagogues* and teachers and leave the lads to their own devices, Lycurgus found them constant employment, knowing that at this age the mind is most active and ripe for mischief and the desire for pleasure keenest. He made them walk in silence, with their hands tucked in their cloaks and their eyes downcast [*i.e.* like women at Athens]. The result shows how far the male sex excels the female in self-control: for you would no more hear a sound from them than from a stone; they would no more turn their eyes than bronze statues, and you would deem them more shamefast than maidens.

Among those in the flower of youth, on whom the welfare of the city chiefly depends, he sought to instil that competitive spirit that makes a chorus best worth hearing or an athletic contest best worth watching. The *Ephors* choose three outstanding young men as marshals, and they in turn select 100 each, making it clear why they prefer some and pass over others. This engenders a mutual contention and vigilance most dear to the gods and most profitable to the city.

For those who had passed their prime but were still eligible for military service, he recommended hunting as the finest occupation, so long as no public duty prevented. . . .

If anyone were to ask me, do I think that Lycurgus' laws are still in force, I should scarcely have the hardihood to answer "Yes." For this I do know. In the old days the Spartans chose to stay at home and enjoy a modest competency and the society of one another rather than lord it abroad as governors and be corrupted by flattery. They used to fear being detected in possession of gold; now they plume themselves on their wealth. Strangers were deported and citizens forbidden to gad abroad, lest Spartans should pick up lazy ways from foreigners; now those who are reputed first in the state spare no pains to avoid recall from foreign governorships. And there was a time when they strove to be worthy to lead; now they are far more concerned to rule than to be fit for rule. Therefore in those days the Greeks would go to Sparta and beg them to take the lead against aggressors; now many are appealing to each other to avert a renewal of Spartan government. Yet all these reproaches are nothing to wonder at, since it is plain to see that they obey neither God nor the laws of Lycurgus.' (Xenophon: *On the Constitution of Sparta*.)

But this was in the decadent days of the 4th Century. We must picture the Spartiates of 500 B.C. as approaching more nearly to their own grim ideal: warrior ants of a human ant-hill, finding in their joyless isolation a stern and disciplined joy.

### *The Last of the Gentlemen*

It was only at Sparta and a few cultural backwaters that the landed gentry preserved their power and their traditional standards into the commercialized

world of the 5th and 4th Centuries. But they did not everywhere perish, as at Megara, in a welter of civil strife. More often they accommodated themselves to the new age and died out gracefully. In backward districts, such as Boeotia, the descendants of Hesiod's 'gift-devouring kings' shed their lordship slowly. Little is known of the early history of Boeotia, except that its rustic 'cities' or cantons were gradually grouped into a loose federation under the leadership of Thebes. The 'Theban Eagle', Pindar, is the earliest Greek writer, apart from Homer and Hesiod, whose works have survived in any bulk. But he is valuable to the historian not as a representative of the 'Boeotian swine' but as the last mouthpiece of the old nobility throughout Hellas.

Pindar wrote on many themes, but almost all his extant poems are choric odes, composed to be sung in celebration of athletic or (occasionally) musical triumphs in the Panhellenic games at Olympia or elsewhere. The victors are acclaimed for the glory each has brought to his own city, whether he hail from 'happy Thessaly' or Libyan Cyrené, 'of all lands fruitfulest'; from 'sea-girt Rhodes, child of Aphrodité and bride of the Sun', or where 'Sicily rich in flocks' uprears the 'snowy column of Etna, year-long nurse of biting snow'. But all owe a common allegiance to that code of chivalry promulgated in the Homeric epics and finely restated by Pindar.

Since die we must, why drag out nameless years  
To a dull end and coddle our grey hairs,  
Of fair deeds portionless?

(*Olympian Odes*, i, 82-84.)

This is the spirit of the 'best people', the class to which the poet himself is proud to belong. At the end of the ode he takes leave of the victor thus:

Thine be it to walk kingly all thy days,  
Mine to exult in friends who win the bays,  
While Hellas far and wide echoes my wisdom's<sup>1</sup> praise!

This is almost equivalent to another ending:

Mine be it by the good to live befriended!

(*Pythian Odes*, ii, 96.)

Needless to say, his political creed is 'the rule of the best' (*aristocracy*). As he says in his earliest poem (502 B.C.):

an heirloom to the good,  
Sage city-piloting hath from their sires accrued.

(*Pythian Odes*, x, 71-72.)

This sort of goodness is normally inherited; it cannot be learnt.

Sure stands inborn nobility;  
But virtue taught stumbles with faltering step.

(*Nemean Odes*, iii, 40-41.)

None the less it can be strengthened by examples, drawn from that common stock of myths that served the poet as a forceful and decorative shorthand. Instead of preaching abstract virtues, he can point with far more effect to their embodiments in Hercules or Perseus or some other hero well known to his audience.

Inspired with this moral and educational purpose, Pindar takes the Homeric gods far more seriously than Homer himself did. He is careful to expurgate the myths ('Tis hateful wisdom to malign the gods'); and he banishes civil war from Olympus by exalting Zeus to a more unquestioned supremacy. His conception of divine retribution here and hereafter is quite un-Homeric and belongs rather to

<sup>1</sup> 'Wisdom' (*sophia*) still meant 'art' in Pindar's world; in contemporary Ionia it already meant 'philosophy'.



the religion of 'Orpheus'. One famous passage illustrates both his social and his religious outlook.

Proud wealth indeed, with brodered virtue dight,  
To this end and to that leadeth men's feet aright,  
Prompting high thoughts that hunt afar,  
A splendour-shedding star,  
Man's truest light;

Let him that holdeth it but guard this truth,  
That souls unrighteous, when life's thread is broken,  
A judge awaiteth, void of ruth,  
Whose words of doom once spoken  
For every sin wrought under God's clear sky  
In earth's black caves exact sure penalty.

But, when the good man dies,  
His is a toilless morrow;  
The splendour of a day about him lies  
Whose sun shall set not, neither rise;  
No more his sturdy hand tough earth shall furrow  
Or the sea's barren wave that yieldeth nought.  
Whoso his plighted word hath gladly wrought,  
A tearless day god-favoured souls amid  
Is his eternal lot;  
But the forsworn—the pains they dree are hid.

(*Olympian Odes*, ii, 58-74.)

Of course there is an element in all this of snobbery and humbug. We cannot help wondering how many of Pindar's patrons had a legitimate claim to the illustrious pedigrees with which he credits them. We know that Hiero of Syracuse, whose kingly power and generosity he delights to 'broider in a maze of song', was in fact an upstart *tyrant*, as unscrupulous as he was able. May not others of the company have been prosperous business men, willing to invest a slice of their capital in horses and charioteers and another slice in the poet who immortalized their vicarious victories? Ultimately indeed the Games became vulgarized by the money-making spirit. Brawny prize-fighters ousted those radiant youths, 'four-square and faultless, in hand and foot and mind', who inspired Pindar and contemporary poets and those artists in marble with whom he loves to compare himself. Doubtless these portraits are idealized. But, while the ideal lived, there must have been some who strove to live up to it: a healthy breed in body and soul, earning by laborious days a keen sensuous enjoyment of life and a proud self-confidence, untroubled by philosophic doubt or unnerving emotions. If they had their moods of pagan sadness, even as Homer had, when they felt that man after all was but 'a dream of shadows', they were trained as a class to accept the darker side of life with courage.

One of weal, two of woe,  
Gods to men allot;  
Dull wits reel at the blow,  
But good men murmur not,  
Turning the fairer side to outward show.

(*Pythian Odes*, iii, 81-83.)

This 'Olympian' view of life was bitterly assailed by intellectuals like Xenophanes (who saw clearly that the worship of physical perfection and of the physically perfect Homeric gods formed part of the same aristocratic religion). It failed to satisfy the demands of the critical intellect or the awakening religious sense of man's frailty and dependence. Its individualistic ideal ('Be what you are!') was incompatible with the communal spirit of the city-state. It had a

powerful enemy in human laziness and self-indulgence. And events proved that even in athletics and war the harmoniously developed amateur could not effectively compete with mentally and physically misshapen specialists: even the relatively specialized warrior-citizens of Sparta (among whom non-military exercises were discouraged) succumbed at last to professional soldiers. So in the 5th and 4th Centuries the ideal died out with the class that had cherished it. But its inspiration lived on in the more sectional ideals of later times, which went further to meet individual aspirations but never, perhaps, came so near to satisfying the whole man.

### *Athens*

The political unity which Boeotia achieved with difficulty in the 4th Century had been attained in prehistoric times by her southern neighbour Attica, a rocky, mountainous peninsula no bigger than an average English county. Tradition told that king Theseus had induced all its inhabitants to accept common citizenship of that city which Pindar was one day to hail as

Glistening Athens, violet-crowned,  
Bulwark of Hellas far-renowned.

According to Aristophanes, a foreign ambassador had only to quote these lines with appropriate intonation before the sovereign Assembly of the city and the good citizens promptly 'sat up on tiptail' and voted him any favour he might ask, although, as the comedian goes on to point out, the epithet 'glistening' seems less applicable to a city than to a sardine. It is perhaps characteristic of a democracy to enjoy alike the most scathing mockery from its own citizens and the grossest flattery from outsiders.

The early growth of the Athenian state, better known than that of any contemporary, is remarkable for continuity rather than speed. The ancient line of kings survived the Dorian migrations, which passed Attica by; but they were constrained to shed their privileges bit by bit to the jealous nobles, guarding only those ritual functions which were too sacred to tamper with. Ultimately a 'king' was elected yearly to perform certain priestly duties. Military command and the administration of justice were delegated to other officials (*archons*), chosen of course from the aristocracy. Their term of office was gradually shortened, and after 686 B.C. (?) they were appointed for one year only. They were aided and controlled by a Senate of their fellow nobles which met on the *Areopagus* ('Mars' Hill').

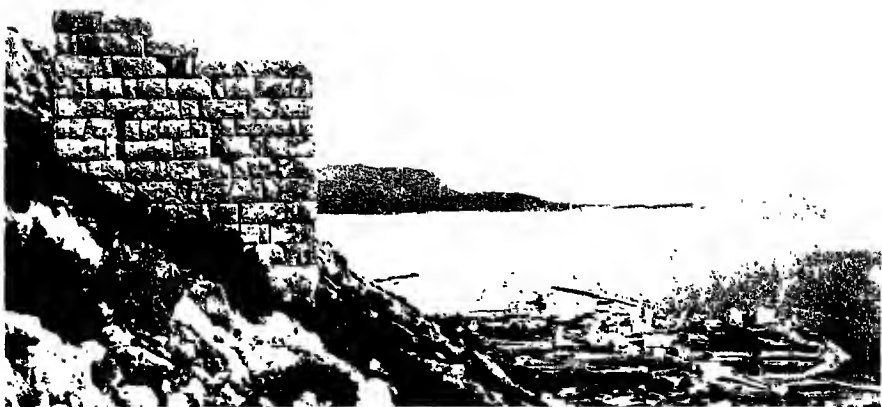
But the common folk of Athens, like their Ionian kinsmen, were not prepared to acquiesce in this arrangement for ever. In 631 (?) a noble named Kylon, exploiting popular discontent and his fame as an Olympic victor, attempted with the aid of the *tyrant* of Megara to establish a tyranny. The attempt came to nothing, and Kylon's followers, who had sought sanctuary before the statue of Athene and surrendered under pledge of safety, were put to death by order of the *archon*, a member of the noble family of the Alcmaeonids. This sacrilegious act aroused such horror (doubtless fomented by political or personal jealousy) that the whole Alcmaeonid clan was solemnly cursed and banished from Athens for ever. Even so, according to one version of the story, the citizens did not feel that they had washed off the stain of blood till they had called in a professional holy man, Epimenides of Crete, to cleanse the city by a ritual purification.

This story illustrates the 'primitive' attitude towards murder. The actual punishment of the murderer is a matter for the kinsmen of the deceased to deal with on the time-honoured principle of the vendetta. Society is interested only in so far as the slayer is polluted or infected with bloodguilt, and therefore to be

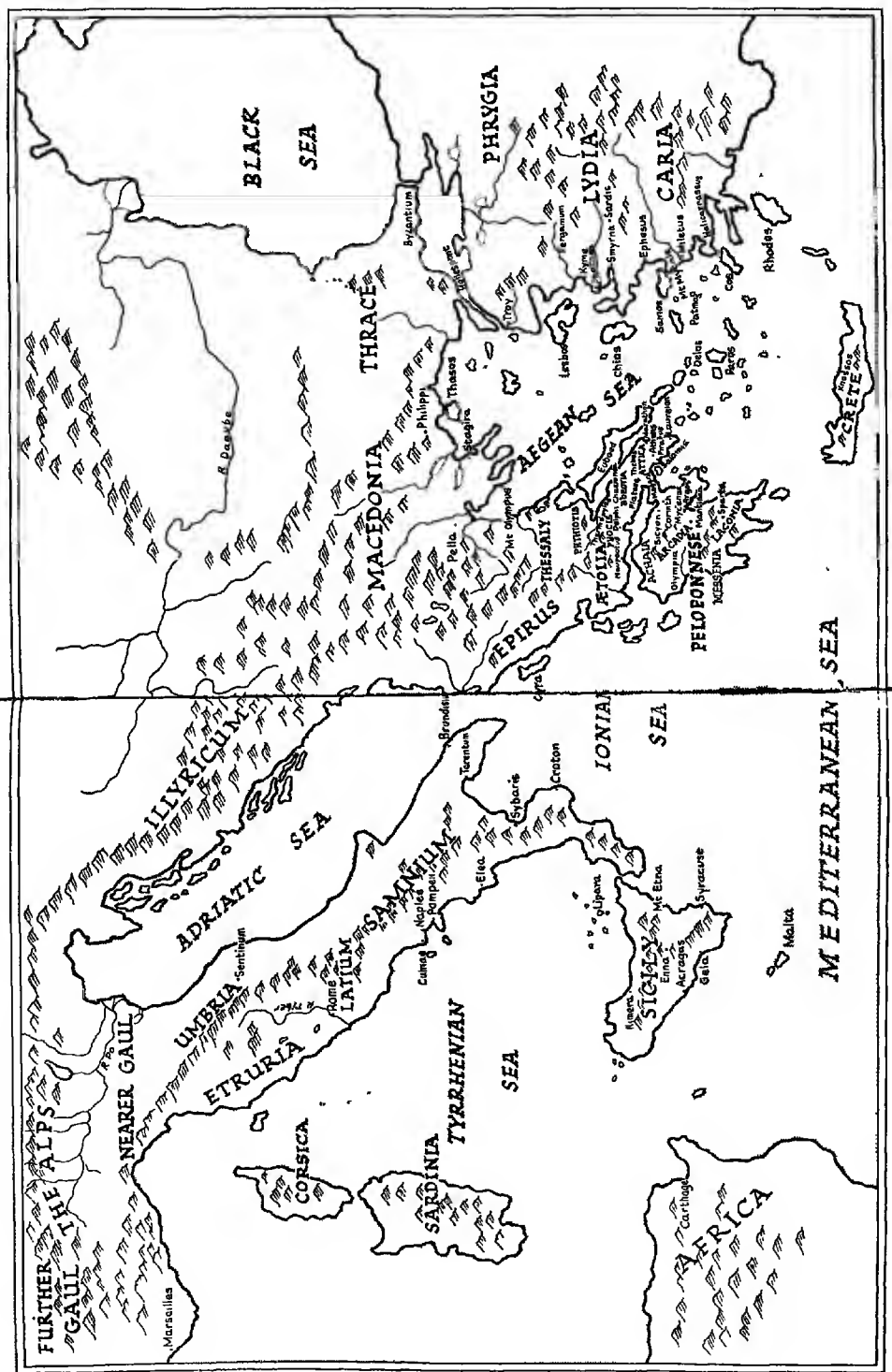


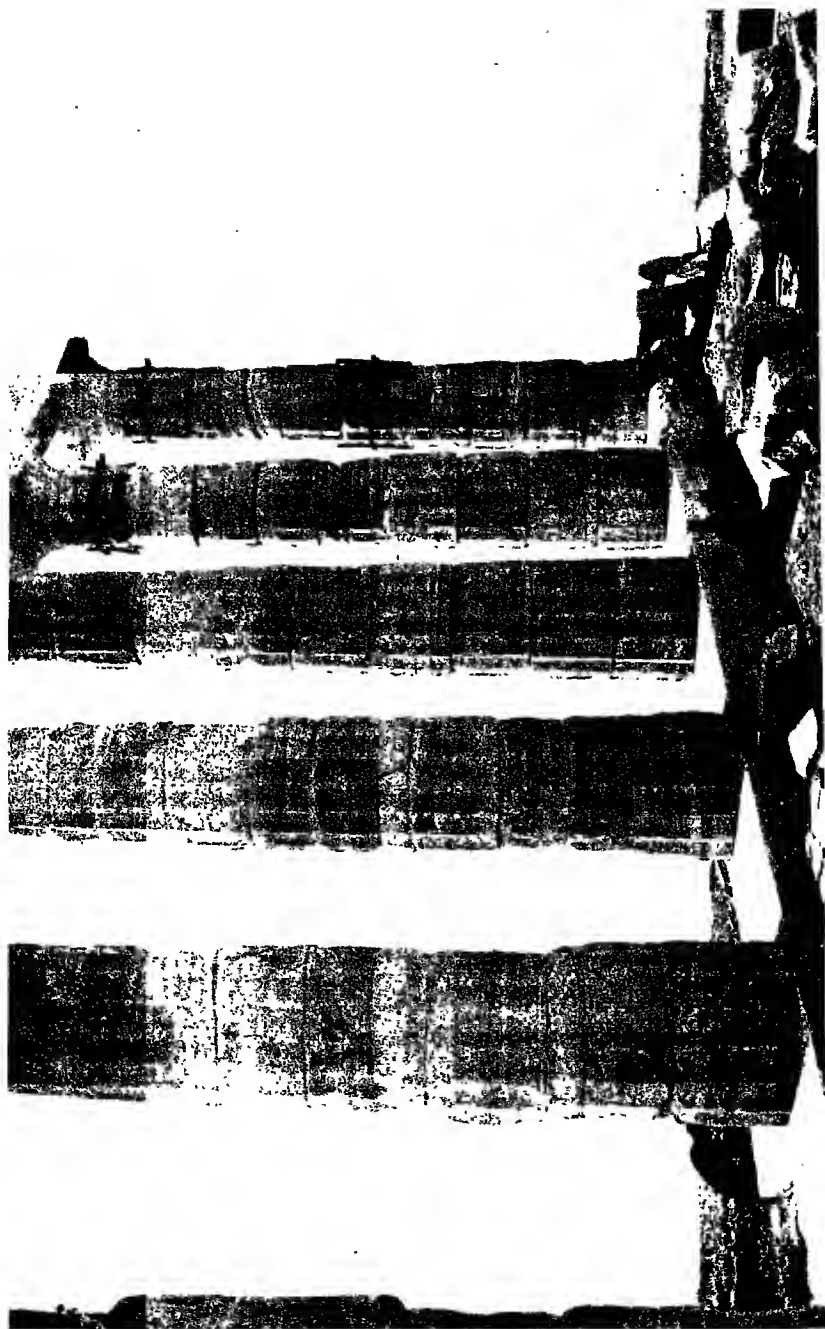
SALAMIS

*[Times' Photograph]*



MYCALÈ





TEMPLE OF THE SEA GOD

driven out like a leper. This stain, being magical, not moral, attaches even to the unintentional or justifiable homicide. In the 5th Century, when a more rational theory of crime and punishment prevailed, the change from the old to the new conception was dramatized by Aeschylus. He represents Orestes, who has killed his mother Clytaemnestra to avenge the murder of his father Agamemnon, as an exile at Athens, pleading his case before the Elders on the Areopagus. Orestes is acquitted by the casting vote of the goddess Athené, who then pacifies the spirits of blind vengeance (personified as the Furies) and turns them into benevolent guardians of the new moral order. As a matter of history, we may date the change in the 7th Century, when there was a widespread demand for written laws recognizing degrees of guilt and prescribing a fixed tariff of penalties. Hitherto, at Athens, as in the Homeric city depicted on the Shield of Achilles, the Elders had passed judgement according to ancestral wisdom, of which they were the sole repositories. If they were not all as corrupt as Hesiod's judges, they must have been arbitrary and inconsistent and prejudiced in favour of their own class. In 621 (?), in response to popular clamour, a code of laws was drawn up by Draco; though it was proverbial in later times for its harshness, it was the indispensable starting-point for reform.

Draco's laws struck the first blow at the power of the nobles. More were to follow. For Attica was now in the throes of the social convulsion that accompanied the growth of industry and commerce. As long as the noble landlords had collected rent in the form of farm produce, they had been content to exact enough for themselves and their dependants: there had been no market for a surplus. In bad years, as in any purely agricultural community, there must have been widespread famine. If an individual farmer had been unlucky, his family would suffer; but he would probably be able to borrow enough from landlord or neighbours to tide him over to the next harvest. Now all that was changed. The overpopulated cities of Ionia were willing to pay a good price for wheat from overseas. The invention of coinage had taken away all limit from the amount a man could hoard or spend. New luxuries were coming into vogue. And, with the breakdown of old social frontiers, wealth was becoming the main road to power and distinction. The privileged class were tempted to make full use of their superior knowledge and authority to exact the maximum from those below them. Now, when a man got into difficulties, he found himself obliged to mortgage his land in order to borrow at heavy interest from some go-getting landlord who had discovered how profitable it is

To lend the poor that funny cash  
That makes them poorer still.

Debt reduced large numbers of free peasants to serfdom, or even to complete slavery, in which they could be sold to foreign masters.

A similar situation in Palestine had roused the wrath of Amos and Micah. In Attica an exasperated populace, thirsting for vengeance, for the cancellation of debt and the redistribution of land, turned for remedy to a philosopher. In 594 B.C. (?) Solon was elected *archon* with a mandate to deal firmly with the crisis.

Solon merits his place among the Seven Sages of Greece rather as a practical man than as a philosopher in our sense. He had travelled as far afield as Egypt on commercial ventures (though his biographer Plutarch insists apologetically that these were a mere pretext for gratifying a laudable desire to see the world). And he had used his eyes and his wits. He may well have learnt something, as the historian Diodorus suggests, from the land reforms of the Egyptian king Bocchoris (Dynasty XXIV), who is said to have abolished slavery for debt. He must certainly have studied the working of the infant democracies of Ionia. He

may not have been the real author of all the sweeping and comprehensive reforms with which posterity credited him, but much of his work is known to us from his own manifestoes—written in verse, since literary prose had still to be invented.

My surest witness at the bar of time  
Is the Great Mother of the Olympian gods,  
Black Earth herself, from whom my hand at length  
Plucked forth the ward-stones reared on many a plot,  
Earth, once a slave, now free. And many a son  
Of Athens brought I home to his fatherland  
Which the gods built; whereof by form of law  
Some had been sold abroad, some by no law,  
And some by debt oppressed had fled the land  
And, hither, thither drifting, spoke no more  
Their Attic tongue; and others here at home,  
In shameful bondage trembling at the whims  
Of brutal masters, I restored to freedom.  
All this I did, combining right with might,  
By force. As I had promised, so I did.  
Like dooms I framed for lordly and for base  
By the straight rule of right. The goad I held  
Had some hand grasped of greedier bent than mine,  
He had not paused, nor quenched the people's wrath  
Till he had skimmed the cream and spilt the milk.

Though he judged it wise at this crisis to 'shake off the burden' of accumulated debt and to prohibit for the future all loans on the security of the person, he realized that the violent redistribution of wealth was not a policy on which a city could continue to thrive. In this, as in all his reforms, he acted with the moderation of a philosopher and the common sense of a business man who knew the value of credit and security. His aim was rather to develop new sources of wealth by encouraging industry and commerce. He forbade the export of agricultural produce, which had tended to enrich the big landlords and raise the cost of living; but he made an exception of olive oil, whose export could be profitably combined with that of the native pottery. He altered Athenian coinage, weights and measures so as to conform to the standards most widely current abroad. He encouraged foreign craftsmen to settle at Athens. He pursued, in short, as so few ancient statesmen did, a consistent economic policy. A hundred years later, as archaeological evidence proves, the Athenian potters had beaten all rivals throughout the Greek world; and Athens had become a wealthy and populous city, dangerously dependent on imported wheat.

Solon made no attempt to abolish class distinctions; he sought to regularize them and make them correspond to economic realities. He divided the citizen body into four property classes: the richest were to enjoy privileges proportionate to their stake in the country, but even the poorest had a vote in the Assembly, where they could help to elect their magistrates though they could not themselves stand for election. For the aristocratic monopoly of justice, which had been a powerful means of oppression even after the promulgation of Draco's code, he substituted large juries, drawn mainly from the poorest class. In time these became a strong force in politics, as it was possible to prosecute magistrates for abuse of their authority. Under Solon's laws the death penalty, for all but the most serious offences, was replaced by a fine. Imprisonment was never used as a penalty, and the alternative of exile was generally open to a condemned criminal.

It is worth noting that the Greeks never worked out a legal code with anything like the logical precision afterwards attained by Roman Law. This is partly, no doubt, because the Roman lawyers were able to use the work of their Greek predecessors, especially the Stoics. But partly it was due to the sheer reasonableness of the Greeks, and their independence of thought. From the surviving

speeches of Athenian pleaders, it is evident that juries were always willing to accept a free interpretation of 'what the legislator must have meant'; and they were easily swayed by irrelevant considerations, such as the general record and popularity of the accused. With a jury of average men, this leaves a dangerous loophole for passion and prejudice: it is only the really wise man who will be, as Plato convincingly argues, wiser than the law:

'For the law could never precisely define what is most virtuous and righteous, so as to enjoin the best. The dissimilarities of men and actions and what I may call the perpetual restlessness of all things human do not allow any hard-and-fast rule on any subject to be laid down for all circumstances and all time by any art whatsoever . . . Yet we see the law struggling to achieve this goal, like an opinionated and ignorant man who will have nothing done contrary to his ordering and never dreams of asking whether anything new has occurred to anyone that may be better than the procedure he himself has enjoined.' (*Statesman*, 294.)<sup>1</sup>

Here Plato is opposing all the traditions of Athenian democracy. The Athenian citizen, though he preferred a certain flexibility in the law, was taught to look upon it as his surest safeguard against tyranny and anarchy. It was not designed, as at Sparta, to regulate every detail of his life. Ideally its sphere was as small as possible; and in this sphere it was supreme. This compromise between the individualist and totalitarian ideals, which was to be the great achievement of Athens, was first actualized in the work of Solon, and first expressed in his poetry.

Not by the will of Heaven is our city doomed to fall:  
Athené watches o'er us, her strong arms shelter all.  
But citizens blind-hearted and leaders lured by gain  
Press on the road to ruin, that leads through pride to pain.  
Unsatisfied with plenty, they will not stay their hand  
From common things or holy, or let the temple stand  
Of Justice, who, unspeaking, heeds present deeds and past  
And at the hour of reckoning takes the full price at last.  
So every state that wakens the inward-slumbering strife  
Feels the deep wound that reaveth of some the lovely life  
And bindeth some in bondage to alien lords afar:  
The public woe comes home to all, unstayed by bolt and bar.  
This truth my spirit bids me to Athens' sons profess:  
Of the ills that assail a city the root is Lawlessness.  
Law smooths the rough, stills discord, and makes the crooked straight;  
Law curbs the proud and withers the budding blooms of fate.

Solon did not establish a democracy. He established an elastic social order inspired by essentially democratic ideals. Then he retired from office and went abroad, leaving his constitution to run its own course. At first its course was a rough one. The spirit of class war, born of centuries of injustice, was not to be appeased by the Solonian compromise. Twenty troubled years threw to the surface a man less scrupulous about seizing absolute power. Athens was fortunate, however, in her *Führer*: the tyranny of Peisistratus was a valuable period of political education, during which the framework of Solon's constitution was preserved while the strength of the old aristocracy was broken and a check was put on the reckless abuse of power by the enfranchized masses. Peisistratus continued and extended Solon's economic reforms: he instituted a form of national insurance—a system of easy loans to farmers in difficulties, financed by a general land tax. He helped to draw Athens further out into the new world of international relations and commercial enterprise. His patronage of the arts was seed sown in a uniquely fruitful soil.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. the passage quoted above (p. 119) from the *Tso-Chuan*.



Peisistratus' son and successor Hippias, especially after his brother had been murdered in an abortive rising, developed something of the conventional suspiciousness and cruelty of the tyrant. He thus forfeited the support of the masses, on which his father had relied, and was at length driven out by an alliance of the rival parties (511 B.C.). The constitution was restored on a more democratic basis by Cleisthenes, a popular leader drawn from the highest ranks of the aristocracy, no less than the accursed house of the Alcmaeonids. Cleisthenes succeeded in breaking down the old class divisions and the clan system, a perpetual source of jealousies and feuds. Henceforth a citizen was a citizen, equal in status and rights to any of his fellow countrymen. Even resident foreigners were admitted to full citizenship, a liberal policy which the later Athenians unwisely abandoned. Of the workings of this democracy in its early days we know little; its triumphs and disasters in the 5th and 4th Centuries will fill another chapter.

### *The Western Mediterranean*

By the middle of the 6th Century the colonies planted by various Greek cities of Asia and the homeland formed a thick fringe all round Sicily, except at the western tip, and along the coast of Italy from the 'heel' to the Bay of Naples (Greek *Nea-polis*, 'New-town'). The colonists had inherited ancient feuds from their mother-cities and soon hatched new ones of their own. They also experienced, in their economic and political growth, the same internal struggles. And they had further to face a new set of problems presented by their Barbarian neighbours.

Before the Greek settlement, Italy and Sicily had been overrun from the north by warlike tribes speaking Aryan dialects of the Italic group (Oscan, Umbrian, Sabine, Latin). Mingling with the earlier inhabitants, these invaders had settled down in villages and townships. On the coast this sturdy peasantry became merged in the Greek city-states by conquest and intermarriage; but the inland tribes, though they acquired many elements of Greek culture, including the alphabet, remained independent and intermittently hostile.

Closely akin in speech to these Italic tribes were the people whom the Greeks called *Kelts*. The Kelts had overrun most of Europe north of the Alps, including the British Isles. Bands of them settled in Spain, but over much of the Peninsula the Iberians preserved their non-Aryan language and culture. Germanic dialects were probably still confined to a small area near the Baltic.

The Kelts were a highly artistic people: they have left tokens of their metallurgical skill in the shape of iron swords and other weapons embellished with intricate designs of loops and spirals. But they did not take kindly to Mediterranean civilization. United into marauding bands by some leader of genius, they won far-ranging victories; but their quarrelsome clans failed to cohere either into powerful kingdoms or into stable city-states. Their priests, the Druids, were credited by the Greeks and Romans with rich treasures of traditional lore; but, as they never committed it to writing, we cannot judge its value. Echoes of it perhaps survive in Irish literature of 1,000 years later.

These European peoples barred the Greeks from penetrating far inland, but they welcomed them as traders and tolerated them as settlers. They did not take to the sea themselves, and they were too disunited to be able to dictate the terms on which they would traffic for overseas merchandise. The chief danger to the Greeks in Western waters came from two rival maritime nations whose traders and colonists had got there before them. Under the leadership of Carthage (another 'New-town'), the Phoenician trading stations along the African coast and in Spain had coalesced into a wealthy empire, jealous of commercial competitors. The Carthaginians had a footing in western Sicily, and from c. 560 B.C. they made a series of efforts to drive the Greeks out of the island. Almost equally

formidable were the Etruscans, who had probably arrived on the west coast of Italy in the 9th Century as immigrants from Lydia in Asia Minor. Soon they dominated the whole coastline north of the Greek zone and also spread inland down the Po valley. The terror inspired by the Etruscan corsairs is manifest in this account of a curious communistic settlement in the Lipari Islands, founded about 580 B.C. by some Greek adventurers who had failed to establish themselves in the Carthaginian sphere of influence in Sicily.

'Having sailed to Lipara and met with a friendly reception there, they decided to inhabit the island in common with the natives. Afterwards, becoming involved in war with the piratical Etruscans, they built a navy. Then, while one section of them cultivated the islands in the common interest, the others kept armed guard against the pirates. For some time they lived communally, holding all their possessions in common and taking their meals together. Later they parcelled out Lipara, in which their city stood, but cultivated the other islands in common. Ultimately they parcelled out all the islands for periods of 20 years, after which there was a reallocation.' (Diodorus of Sicily, v, 9.)

About 535 B.C. an alliance of Carthaginians and Etruscans set a limit to the westward spread of Greek civilization by checking colonial expansion along the Spanish coast from its furthest outpost, the Phocaean colony of Marseilles. It is hardly surprising that Dionysius of Phocaea, a generation later, regarded ships of these two Barbarian nations as fair game for an honest seaman.

These foreign contacts and threats gave a distinctive twist to the history of the western Greeks. Able military leaders were a necessity; *tyrannies* therefore appeared more frequently and lasted longer. From the 5th to the 3rd Century, *tyrants* of Syracuse figured, time and again, as champions of the Greek cities against Carthage. They were thus able to found stable dynasties and rule more or less constitutionally under the title of 'king'. The colonies in Italy and Sicily must also have derived from racial and cultural mixture something of their vigour and freshness. It was in these unruly communities that the need for written laws first made itself felt (middle 7th Century). And the colonists, less rooted in tradition, showed themselves more open than the homeland to new ideas. They were ready to welcome such daring thinkers as Xenophanes and Pythagoras. At Croton in the 'toe' of Italy, where Pythagoras settled, his disciples became so powerful that they assumed control of the state. Under this Puritanical régime the Crotoniates scored a crushing victory over their neighbour and commercial rival Sybaris, an easy-going democracy notorious for luxury and indiscipline. But even the Crotoniates were not above human weakness. In the 5th Century they revolted against this 'Rule of the Saints' and drove the Pythagorean brotherhood into exile.

This incident, whose details are very obscure, must serve as a sample of the vigorous political and intellectual life of the Western Greeks. The literature in which it found expression has perished almost without trace, and we cannot give them the position they deserve in the history of civilization.

One other incident is worth noting. Late in the 6th Century the *tyrant* of Cumae, the northernmost Greek colony on the Italian coast, won a signal victory over the Etruscans. This victory enabled the Latin and Sabine inhabitants of a little market-town on the Tiber to drive out their Etruscan king and set up an aristocratic republic on the Greek model (an event almost contemporaneous with the final expulsion of tyranny from Athens). This minor occurrence, on the outskirts of the Hellenic world cannot have struck contemporary Greeks as having any particular significance.

## XIII

## EXPERIMENT IN FREEDOM

*Freedom Triumphant*

THE five cultural centres revealed by our First Survey were being painfully welded by the persistent coming and going of traders and the more spectacular exploits of conquerors into a continuous chain of civilization. In the 6th Century the horizon of Ionian merchants (witness Hecataeus of Miletus) extended from the Atlantic to India. Their Phoenician and Aramaean rivals may have been even better informed, but they were chary of publishing what they knew. An extensive knowledge of geography (including economic geography) must have been needed to assess the tribute due to the kings of Persia. China, indeed, was still a world apart, but direct intercourse between China and India (if not already established) was soon to have important consequences. Throughout the length of this chain, knowledge in general was becoming more widely diffused and at the same time more secular, passing from hidebound local priesthoods to merchant adventurers and lay administrators.

While in some ways the civilized world was thus being unified, in others it was being diversified. The older civilizations, each shut away in its own rigid shell, had after all been strikingly similar in their basic ideas and institutions. The more elastic societies of our Second Survey left room for such diverse social experiments as the Confucian reign of 'propriety', Indian monasticism, Jewish theocracy, Phoenician plutocracy and the vagaries of the Greek *polis*. The Greek world, indeed, stands out as the very type and symbol of diversity. And confronting it across the narrow island-studded Aegean sprawled the unwieldy bulk of the Persian Empire, which had coerced a great part of the civilized world into a unified allegiance. But the unity forcibly imposed by the Achaemenid kings and their bodyguard of spearmen was a thin crust covering many deep crevasses; the variegated surface of Hellas, gashed with fissures and crosscuts innumerable, disguised a potential unity whose strength had yet to be tested—the unity of free men willing to work together for a common cause.

In the inevitable conflict between these two expansive forces, the first and second rounds had fallen easily to Persia. Hopelessly divided among themselves, the Asiatic Greeks had submitted to Cyrus, and their revolt against Darius had ended in the fiasco of Ladé. Only Miletus, birthplace of science and philosophy, fought hard for freedom. The Sack of Miletus (495 B.C.) was chosen by a contemporary Athenian playwright as the theme of a tragedy, which so enflamed party feelings that the author was punished with a heavy fine.

The Athenians, with the light-hearted adventurousness of a young democracy, had sent a small force to aid their Ionian kinsmen in revolt, an enterprise in which the cautious Spartans had refused to be embroiled. In 490 B.C. Darius sent a punitive expedition to subdue Athens and restore the exiled tyrant Hippias. To the general amazement, the Athenian spearmen, led by Miltiades, charged headlong down from the hills on to the plain of Marathon and drove the invincible Barbarians into the sea. Darius began to equip a much larger force. His preparations, cut short by death, were resumed by his son Xerxes, who by 480 B.C. had mobilized the armed strength of the Empire to complete the conquest of all Greece. For the first time since the Trojan War, the Greeks were galvanized into combined action. Despite the mutual jealousy and suspicion born of ancient feuds, they decisively defeated the invaders by sea at Salamis and on land at Plataea, thanks mainly to the prowess of the Athenians and the Spartans respectively. Many other cities had co-operated loyally, but some had held back and

a few had even been forced into the ranks of the enemy. Some of the Western colonies might have been willing to lend their aid, but they had been faced by a danger nearer home. The Carthaginians, acting in concert with their Phoenician kinsmen in the Persian fleet, sent a large force to conquer Sicily; but they were defeated at Himera by a Greek levy under the *tyrant* of Syracuse.

Here surely, if anywhere in the world's history, is a decisive campaign. If Darius had lived to lead the great invasion; if Xerxes had inherited a fraction of his father's ability; if he had stooped to play on Greek disunity and jealousy; if he had not been betrayed by pride of numbers into elementary blunders; if he had not been distracted by a timely revolt of the Babylonians—how easily he might have drawn the whole Greek world into the compass of one vast Oriental despotism, destined to collapse like its predecessors and be replaced by another despotism like itself!<sup>1</sup> European civilization, with its ideals of personal and political freedom and its unique achievements in art and science, would have remained among the unrealized potentialities of the human species. This is in fact a test case for the theory that the course of history is determined by 'decisive events'—by the incalculable decisions of free agents or by contingencies as trivial in themselves as the proverbial 'loss of one horse-shoe nail' or the length of Cleopatra's nose. In the long run, perhaps, neither individual freewill nor the quaint freaks of coincidence can avail against that mysterious goddess, so often invoked by our modern despots, the Logic of History. And in this instance it may be contended that even within the framework of a Persian empire the European peoples would in time have dominated the less vigorous and efficient Asiatics, and that in fact the defeat of Xerxes only postponed for about a century and a half the inevitable triumph of centralized despotic government. Yet the world is surely a different place today because, during that brief spell stolen from the Fates, the Greeks (in particular the Athenians) made man's first experiment in freedom. They drew from their victory the inspiring belief (not always borne out by subsequent events) that in free communities men are not only better and happier than under arbitrary rule but more assured of material success. As an attempt to find a permanently satisfactory way of organizing human life, the Athenian experiment (like other experiments) was a failure. But it left certain memorials to be (as Thucydides claimed for his History) 'a possession for ever'.

It is this sense of miraculous deliverance, and the buoyant self-confident spirit it engendered, that exalts the Persian War to a unique place among the tragic squabbles of the human family. This spirit lives for ever in those glowing pages that stand as an introduction to the prose literature of Europe:

'The setting forth of the research (*historiê*) of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, that the things that have happened to men may not be obliterated by time nor the great and wonderful deeds shown forth both by Greeks and by Barbarians be without glory, more especially the reasons for which they went to war each with other.' (Herodotus, i, 1.)

Herodotus' use in this context of the word *historiê* (a technical term of the Ionian scientists) has given it perpetual life and a new meaning in the form *history* or *story*. This volume already owes much to the Father of History and his Homeric power of depicting live men and women against a substantial sunlit background, both geographical and social. The moral of his tale may be illustrated by the words in which a Spartan is made to speak of his countrymen to the Great King:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato: *Laws* iii, 693: 'If the common resolution of Athenians and Spartans had not warded off the impending enslavement, already we might almost say that the Greek communities would be jumbled together and Greeks confounded with Barbarians, as those under Persian tyranny now live broken up and tacked together in miserable confusion.'

'Being free, they are not wholly free; but over them is a master, the law, whom they fear more than your men fear you. They do what it bids, and its bidding is ever the same: not to shirk battle, whatever the odds, but standing their ground to conquer or to die.' (vii, 104.)<sup>1</sup>

Though Herodotus here refers specifically to Sparta, the supremacy of law, which he contrasts with the supremacy of an individual ruler, is the mark of all Greek constitutions. Elsewhere he compares the merits of different constitutions in the curious form of a debate among three Persian nobles as to the best type of government to adopt after the death of Cambyses. The first speaker asks:

'How could monarchy be a sound thing, when the monarch is free to do what he will without being called to account? Even the best of men, lifted to such a height, would be lifted out of customary ways of thought. He becomes filled with overweening pride and envy; consorts only with the worst citizens; demands immoderate admiration, but charges his admirers with flattery; he upsets ancestral usages, violates women, puts men to death without trial. But, where the multitude rules, it bears the loveliest of names, *isonomy*;<sup>2</sup> it does nothing of what the monarch does; it appoints rulers by lot and holds them accountable, and it submits all decisions to consultation in common.' (iii, 80.)

The second speaker makes some good points in favour of aristocracy, arguing that the multitude

'has not been taught, and does not know, anything fine or appropriate; but it plunges blindly into affairs and sweeps them along like a torrent in spate.' (iii, 81.)

The argument is carried a stage further by the third speaker (who is Darius himself, then a likely claimant to the throne): if the rule of the best men is better than the rule of the multitude, then the rule of the best man of all must be best of all. Besides (and this truly Oriental plea really clinches the matter), why change the customs of our fathers, which are well enough as they are?

Whatever might be said for autocracy in theory, the outcome of Xerxes' invasion seemed to many besides Herodotus to have proved its inferiority in practice. Up to a point the autocrat might triumph; but he was always tempted to go too far and provoke the envy of the gods, who 'love to lop off the overtopping growths'. The doctrine that 'pride goes before a fall', familiar to every Athenian schoolboy who had learnt his Solon, had received spectacular corroboration. With renewed force it helped to inspire the greatest intellectual achievement of 5th-Century Athens, the tragic drama.

Some 40 years before Herodotus completed his work, the Greek victory was interpreted in the same spirit by the Athenian playwright Aeschylus, who had himself fought at Marathon and Salamis. In *The Persians* (468 B.C.) Aeschylus presented the story of the great invasion from the point of view of the vanquished invaders. This was not a mere trick to glorify Greece the more. Naturally, behind the wailing of the Persian chorus, wild and unrestrained as befits Orientals, we can hear the exultation of the Greeks in their new-won freedom:

<sup>1</sup> So Plato (*Laws* iii, 698) says that the Athenians of those days were willing slaves of the laws and obedient to their mistress, Conscience (*Aidōs*).

<sup>2</sup> This word was a slogan of the popular party; it is not always clear whether it expresses the Liberal ideal of 'equality before the law' or the more Socialistic one of 'equality of shares'. Cf. Diodorus, ii, 39 (with reference to the Indian caste system): 'It is childish to provide laws for all men equally and at the same time make possessions unequal.'

Far and wide through the empery Asian  
 The law of the Persian is broken;  
 No more at the nod of a master  
     The tribute is garnered and stored.  
 None humbles himself in prostration  
 To a sovran brought low by disaster;  
 But the tongue that was chained is outspoken  
     And the people is free of its word.  
 The yoke of dominion is shattered.  
 On Salamis isle blood-bespattered  
     Lies the glory of Persia outpoured. (586-599)

But the Persians are dignified and sympathetic figures, and their defeat is attributed partly to natural causes (the soil of Greece fights for its children by starving the intruder) and partly to the anger of the outraged gods. The ghost of Darius warns his countrymen:

Plataea's dead, felled by the Dorian spear,  
 Will bear mute witness to the eyes of men  
 Three generations hence that mortal thoughts  
 Must stay in mortal bounds; for blossoming pride  
 Bears fruit of doom, in sorrow harvested. (812-818)

But the Athenian audience was quite shrewd enough to see that the warning had a wider application.

The classical Athenian drama, though it retained little trace of its origin in the age-old ritual of the Vegetation God, remained an act of public worship. Under the inspiration of the Homeric epics, a series of dramatic geniuses breathed life into the dialogues, which had begun as a mere interlude in the choric hymns and dances in honour of Dionysus, transforming them into a vehicle for the portrayal of individual character. But, despite this heightened human interest, they were still preoccupied with those cosmic mysteries of life and death and the divine governance of the world which had been the theme, however crudely handled, of the old nature ritual.

In his treatment of traditional subjects, Aeschylus clearly reflects the thought of an age which witnessed the failure of despotism and the passage of power (at least in Athens) from the Few to the Many. He uses the legend of Prometheus or of Orestes to illustrate the birth of a new order. Zeus, the ruler of the universe, has seized the sceptre that Kronos wrested from Uranos. Is there any escape from the 'vain burden', the vicious circle of wrong and retribution, the rule that 'he who did must suffer'? Yes, Zeus has established another rule: 'By suffering comes understanding.' But first he had to learn this in his own person: he too had been tempted by the pride of power that overthrew his predecessors, but he had found in forbearance a means of redemption for himself and for mankind. This was a poet's vision of life, and Aeschylus did not attempt to expound it as a philosophy or a religion or a political theory—though it contained the germs of all three.

Aeschylus' successor Sophocles has a vision of life that is not dissimilar, though he gives less indication of the mental fight by which he attained to it. He too strikes a note of warning to a people proud of freedom but not fully conscious of its limitations. In his *Antigoné*, the tyrant's creed ('The city is the ruler's'), backed by the tyrant's plea ('There is no evil worse than anarchy'), is countered by an appeal to higher authority:

The unwritten edicts of the gods,  
 Unshakable, no mortal may transgress.  
 Their life is not of now or yesterday  
 But of all time, and none knows whence they came. (454-457)

But the rebel, no less than the tyrant, pays the penalty of pride. Man, 'the most miraculous of beings', has broken free from nature: he is master of the elements and the brutes. But it is a perilous freedom; for his gift of 'speech and wind-swift thought' may lead as easily to evil as to good and, if he disregards 'the troth-plight justice of the gods', he will not long remain 'high-cited'.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Classical' quality of his thought and expression endeared Sophocles to critics from the time of Aristotle to the 18th Century. The 19th-Century Romantics preferred the rugged grandeur and emotional intensity of Aeschylus. It was left to the 20th Century to discover 'Euripides the Modern'. Behind the stiff conventional masks of the Attic stage, Euripides' characters are citizens of a changing world, deeply concerned with current problems. In the *Suppliant Women*, king Theseus of Athens is represented as an up-to-date constitutional monarch upholding the virtues of democracy. But Euripides' thought travelled ahead of his contemporaries, sometimes on lines that made him unpopular: his sensitive soul was troubled by the social position of women and slaves, which seemed scarcely compatible with the ideal of liberty: and he had picked up ideas from the Ionian philosophers that made him dangerously sceptical about the old gods and the infallibility of divine justice.

In his critical and sometimes carping attitude, Euripides belongs to the new age that sets in towards the end of the 5th Century. Earlier Athenian tragedy (and that is our justification for considering it here) is our best witness to the spirit of the preceding age, that vital half-century that followed the invasion of Xerxes.

#### *Imperial Democracy (479-429 B.C.)*

The vanquished Persians had lost many men, a little territory and an incalculable amount of prestige; but outwardly their empire remained much as it had been before. The victorious Greeks were faced with an urgent and knotty problem. They had united to defend their freedom. Could they maintain that unity and yet remain free? They had no political machinery or intellectual preparation for freedom except within the narrow limits of the city-state. Their best hope lay in some scheme of federal union as Thales had suggested to the Ionians and as was later tried out in the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues. But in fact they envisaged only two kinds of union: free and sovereign cities might enter into unstable 'alliances' for some specific purpose, or one city might 'enslave' others.

The Greeks of Asia Minor had regained their liberty after a sea-fight at Mycalé (479 B.C.) which reversed the verdict of Lade. They realized that its preservation depended on the continuance of the alliance. But most of their European brethren soon lost interest and began to remember private feuds. The Spartans preferred to mind their own business. But the Athenians, who were in the mood for anything, were only too glad to put themselves at the head of an anti-Persian league. It was agreed that every member state should furnish a certain quota of ships and men or an equivalent sum of money. By gradual stages this contribution became a tribute directly payable to Athens, and the alliance became an empire. If any of the 'allied' cities wished to secede or unaccountably preferred an oligarchic to a democratic constitution, it was promptly brought to book by the navy, which by this time was almost wholly an Athenian navy maintained at the expense of the tributaries. Athens the liberator of Hellas had become Athens the tyrant city: her gains in wealth and power were offset by the loss of less tangible assets.

In 448 the long-drawn-out Persian War was ended: in effect, the Great King

<sup>1</sup> The famous chorus (ll. 332-372) in which these expressions occur is an analysis of the chief elements in human civilization—the things that distinguish man from the animals—a theme already handled by Aeschylus (cf. p. 62 above) and later used by Euripides (*Suppliant Women*, 201-218). It recurs in no fewer than six of the surviving fragments of other tragedians—Nos. 60, 236, 542, 711, 823 and 931 in Nauck's collection, of which No. 542 (by Critias) is particularly interesting.

recognized the cities of the Aegean seaboard as tributaries not of the Persian satrap but of the Athenian *demos*. Theoretically there was now no reason why the tribute should be levied. But the Athenians thought they could still find a use for it: their costly navy might even yet be needed for defence, and in the meantime did good service by keeping the sea clear of pirates; they were maintaining garrisons and settlements here and there in 'allied' territory, besides juries of citizens as a court of appeal for the 'allies' and to deal with mercantile disputes; and they were pouring out money on the adornment of their beloved city that her beauty might kindle the pride and joy of the most disgruntled tribute-payer.

The allies might have acquiesced in this arrangement if they had had any prospect of admission to full partnership in the Empire. But there was in fact no road by which they could normally attain to Athenian citizenship. Merely as allies they had no rights whatever at Athens. If they settled there, they could join the class of 'resident aliens'. But, though these formed the bulk of the commercial and artisan class at Athens and enjoyed many rights not normally accorded by Greek cities to non-citizens, they had no share in the government and no means of improving their status. Even the offspring of mixed marriages were debarred from citizenship.

Women also, as elsewhere in Greece, were excluded from political life. Even in social life they had less freedom at Athens than in contemporary Ionia or Sparta. They were far from enjoying the legal rights allowed by the Hammurabi code. The Athenian conception of woman's place in society is clearly expressed by Xenophon.

'For it seems to me that the gods, in yoking together male and female in partnership, acted with great foresight. First, for the procreation of children, that the race might not die out and that the aged might have active hands to feed them. Moreover, since mankind do not live in the open like beasts, there is need of one to work in the open, ploughing and sowing and planting and herding, and one to guard the fruits of his labour when he has brought them within doors and to do the work of the house, minding the children, preparing food and making clothes. So the gods made woman's nature apt for the one task and man's for the other, the one more affectionate, the other stronger and more fearless. And to both alike they gave memory and attentiveness and self-control. So it is not possible to say that one is favoured above the other. But, because their natures are different, they have more need of each other and the partnership is more beneficial, the one making up for the other's deficiencies. And what the gods ordained, custom has approved, holding it more seemly for a woman to bide at home than to gad abroad, but for a man more shameful.' (Xenophon: *The Householder*, 7.)

The population of Attica also included a high proportion of slaves. Some were the offspring of slave parents: others were Greek prisoners of war (though many of these were ransomed); others were Barbarians, generally from the wilder parts of Asia Minor or the Balkans, captured in war or kidnapped and sold in the market. The mental inferiority of the Barbarians to the Greeks, or at least their ignorance of Greek ways, gave colour to Aristotle's argument that some men are 'slaves by nature'. The most intractable of them were sent to work in chain gangs in the silver mines of Laureion, where they were about as inhumanly treated as men ever have been. The ordinary slave, however, whether employed in handicraft, farmwork or domestic service, was often no worse off economically than the free labourer. His person was to some extent protected by law, and he had a fair chance of acquiring his freedom (by purchase or favour) and so entering the class of resident aliens. The cheeky slave who outwits his master was a familiar figure in comedy and no doubt also in life.



If we leave out of the reckoning these three large classes, aliens, women and slaves, the Athenian constitution at this time was a democracy in the literal sense—government *by* the people. The sovereign people decided major questions of policy in the Assembly of all adult male citizens (*Ecclesia*). The Assembly voted on resolutions put to it by a committee of the Council of 500 (*Boulé*), but was not tied down to the agenda so prepared. Members of the Council and most other office-holders were appointed yearly by a combination of ballot and lot and were not immediately re-eligible. Any politically minded citizen could thus count on holding office of some sort at least two or three times in his life. Appointment by lot prevented a monopoly of office by a minority of professional politicians with specialized abilities. Such men had, however, a fine field for their rhetorical talent in the meetings of the Assembly (which was easily swayed by eloquence), and they might aspire to an influential position on the board of ten Generals who, for obvious military reasons, were chosen by vote, not by lot. Thanks to this opening for talent, Pericles was able, during the 30 years preceding his death in 429, to maintain such an ascendancy that Thucydides could describe the constitution as 'nominally a democracy, but actually government by the best citizen'.

Political equality within the citizen body did not mean social equality. The rich might grumble that their only privilege was that of paying for such spectacular public services as fitting out a warship or staging a tragedy. But they were often well repaid by popular favour in the Assembly or the law-courts. While the 'best' families remained much in evidence, there were other standards of social judgement—so that Socrates, on seeing a crowd admiring a fine horse, could ask with his usual affectation of simplicity: "Does this horse own a lot of money?"

With all its injustices and snobberies, the age of Pericles still merits its unique place in history as an age when free men chose freely to devote their talents to the service of the state, when men who had not lost touch with traditional standards welcomed new ideas. Before we examine these ideas and their disruptive force, let us try to see Periclean Athens as it appeared to the Greeks themselves. First, Plutarch, who has studied the period from sources no longer open to us, looks back over a gulf of five centuries, admiring but not fully comprehending.

'Pericles gave a freer rein to the *demos* and made it his policy to win their favour. By continually devising some show or festival or procession, he cultivated their taste with refined pleasures. Every year he sent abroad 30 galleys in which many citizens sailed eight months on end, drawing pay and at the same time acquiring proficiency in seamanship. He sent out others as colonists to various sites, including Sybaris in Italy, which they renamed Thurii.<sup>1</sup> By such means he rid the city of a crowd of unemployed whom idleness would have made mischievous, relieved the poverty of the masses and deterred the allies from revolt. But the greatest delight and adornment to Athens, the greatest marvel to foreigners and the sole surviving witness to Hellas of her ancient power and prosperity was his programme of public works—the Parthenon, the House of Initiation at Eleusis, the Long Wall, the Hall of Song and the statues of Athené in bronze and gold—the work of great artists and architects under the supervision of Pheidias. No item of Pericles' policy was looked on with more disfavour by his opponents or more bitterly assailed in the Assembly.

' "The people has disgraced itself," they cried, "by appropriating the common treasure of the Greeks from Delos. And the most plausible pretext,

<sup>1</sup> Most Athenian colonies were armed garrisons planted on the soil of disaffected 'allies'. Thurii (444 B.C.) was an experiment. It included settlers from all over Greece, among them Herodotus. In spite of its model lay-out planned by Hippodamus and its model constitution framed by Protagoras (below, p. 229), the colony was not a success.

that they had removed it to safety in fear of the Barbarians, has been nullified by Pericles. Hellas feels herself the victim of outrage and tyranny, when she sees us using her forced contribution to the war in order to trick out our city like a vain woman with precious stones and images and thousand-talent temples."

'Pericles would proclaim to the people: "No account is due for moneys spent by champions who fend off the Barbarians from those who contribute neither horse nor ship nor soldier, but only money. It belongs not to the giver but to the receiver, so long as he does what he is paid to do. When the city is fully equipped for war, she is entitled to spend the surplus on works glorious when done and salutary in the doing, which stimulate every art, stir every hand and enrich well-nigh the whole city with beauty alike and sustenance."

'For indeed every craft found work for an army of labourers—carpenters, modellers, bronzesmiths, stonemasons, dyers, workers in gold and ivory, painters, broderers, engravers, porters and conveyers, traders and sailors and pilots by sea, and by land cartwrights, stablemen, drivers, rope-twisters, flax-workers, harness-makers, road-makers and miners—so that every age and class shared in the general prosperity. And, while the works shot up towering in magnitude, in form and grace inimitable, and craftsmen strove to surpass their craft in artistry, not the least marvel of all was the speed of its accomplishment. In beauty each creation was even then a masterpiece of antiquity; yet in freshness each is to this day brand new and in its prime. So does the bloom of youth linger upon them, guarding their features ever untouched by time, as though in each there lived commingled with its substance an evergreen spirit and an ageless soul.' (*Life of Pericles*, 11-13 [condensed].)

Here, by way of contrast, is an almost contemporary witness, a little pamphlet *On the Constitution of Athens* (wrongly attributed to Xenophon) which must have been published at Athens only a year or two after Pericles' death. The author, an unknown Athenian, has been dubbed the Old Oligarch.<sup>1</sup> We might almost call him Colonel Blimp.

'I do not praise the Athenians for choosing a constitution such that the lower orders are better treated than the gentlemen. But, since they have made this choice, I will show that they do well in safeguarding the constitution and in other particulars in which the other Greeks judge them to go astray.

'First, it is fair that the poor and the commonalty should have more say than the noble and the rich, because the city owes her power to helmsmen and boatswains, petty officers, look-out men and shipwrights, far more than to spearmen and nobles and the better classes generally. So it seems fair that all should have a share in office, whether by lot or by vote, and every man should be free to speak his mind. The people leave to those best qualified such offices as those of general or master of the horse, whose mismanagement would be a danger to themselves, and covet only such as bring profit or domestic advantage.

'If they allowed the rich and the better sort to prosper, the commoners would be strengthening a power opposed to themselves: for in every land the best element is opposed to democracy. In the better classes there is least unruliness and injustice and most care for goodness; in the common folk most ignorance, insubordination and rascality. For poverty inclines men

<sup>1</sup> By A. Zimmern: *The Greek Commonwealth*. The following version gives the main substance of his illuminating document in condensed form.

to vice, and from lack of money some lack culture and education. You may wonder what good is derived from letting a worthless man say his say. But the commoners realize that they benefit more by his ignorance and rascality and good will than by a better man's virtue and wisdom and ill will: they would rather be free in an ill ordered city than slaves in one well ordered.

'Even the slaves and resident aliens at Athens are an unruly crowd: you may not strike a slave, and he will not step aside for you. This is because, if it were lawful for a free man to strike a slave or an alien or a freedman, he would often strike an Athenian by mistake. For the commonfolk are no better dressed than slaves or aliens and no better to look at. If some slaves are even allowed to live in luxury, that is because, where there is sea power, slaves must receive wages so that they can be hired out to earn for their master and let him go free. But, if my slave were afraid of you, as he would be in Sparta, he might be browbeaten into giving you his money. So they give equality of speech with citizens to slaves and resident aliens. For these last are needed because of the multitude of crafts and the navy. . . .

'In the allied cities the Athenian commoners strengthen their hold by keeping the better class out of office and by robbing, banishing or killing them and exalting the lower orders, whereas the better sort protect their own class, knowing that they have a common interest.<sup>1</sup> It might seem to be in the best interest of Athens that the allies should be best able to pay tribute; but the Athenian commoners would rather leave them just enough to live and work without the power to plot. . . .

'As regular soldiers they acknowledge themselves inferior to their enemies, but they are content so long as they are stronger than their allies. Their sea power enables them to prevent hostile combinations, especially of islanders; to control the imports and exports of other cities; and, by landing at different points on the coast, to ravage the lands of their military superiors. A land force travels slowly and cannot carry many days' provisions, and must either pass through friendly territory or fight its way victoriously; a sea force can travel as far as it likes, coasting hostile territory till it comes to a friendly base. Moreover, the lords of the sea are not affected like landmen by local crop failures, but they draw on the choicest products of Sicily, Italy, Cyprus, Egypt, Lydia, the Black Sea and the Peloponnese. From hearing all kinds of speech, they have picked up a word here and a word there, so that, while the other Greeks have each their own dialect, the Athenians speak a medley of all tongues, Greek and Barbarian.

'As it is impossible for each of the poor severally to enjoy sacrifices and festivals and temples, the city celebrates many rites publicly, and the commonfolk make merry and have their share of the offerings. A few of the rich have private gymnasia and baths and dressing-rooms, but the populace builds these for itself on a large scale, and the common herd gets most enjoyment out of them.

'Only the masters of the sea are sure of plentiful supplies of timber, iron, copper, linen and wax, whereas no other city has even two of these in abundance. In fact, if only they lived on an island, the Athenians would have nothing to fear so long as they kept command of the sea. As it is, though the city rabble are not touched by the depredations of invaders, peasants and landlords suffer, and there is always the risk of a disaffected minority opening the gates to the enemy.

'Oligarchies must needs be bound by treaties and oaths; else the treaty-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isocrates' claim (*Panegyric* 53) that the Athenians, 'with a generous disregard for their own interests, had made their city a common refuge for the oppressed and allied themselves with the weaker against the strong'!

makers would themselves be the treaty-breakers. But a democracy can always shove responsibility on to the proposer or find some other excuse. When their plans miscarry, they accuse a few men of misleading them; when all goes well, they take the credit to themselves.

'They allow none to abuse the masses or make them the butt of comedy, but they are willing enough for comedians to make fun of individuals, knowing that these will generally be men of wealth or rank or position, or else some commoner who is trying by his own exertions to rise above the masses.

'I forgive the *demos* for being democratic—any man may be forgiven for doing himself good; but, if any man who is not of the *demos* prefers a democratic to an oligarchic constitution, he is a rogue using democracy to cloak his misdeeds.'

Lastly, we cannot help calling in evidence a few passages from the much-quoted Funeral Oration, which purports to have been delivered by Pericles over the Athenians who fell in battle in 430 B.C. Actually it is an epitome of the Periclean ideal, composed in a blend of reverence and irony by Thucydides, who had shared that ideal in his youth but lived to see it defeated abroad and dishonoured at home.

'Our form of society (*politeia*) is not a copy but a pattern. Because it is ordered with an eye to the many rather than the few, it is called a *democracy*. In legal status every man has an equal claim with his neighbour when a point is at issue between them; in social status each man's claim is proportioned to his distinction in any particular field. Preferment to public office depends not on origin but on merit, and poverty is no bar to the man who can contribute to the welfare of the city. As we conduct our public affairs freely, so in private life we let our neighbour please himself without offence or suspicion. As individuals we are sociable without interfering. In our relations with the community we are scrupulously law-abiding, obedient to whoever happens to be in authority and to the laws, especially those designed to help victims of injustice and those unwritten laws that are universally revered.

'We excel in the provision of refreshments for the toilworn spirit, conducting public worship by contests and seasonal festivals and special ceremonies of great beauty, whose daily charm banishes care . . .

'Unlike our adversaries [the Spartans], we keep our city open, not for ever deporting aliens to prevent them from learning or seeing something that might be useful to an enemy. Our faith is not so much in armaments and subterfuges as in our own stout hearts. In their upbringing they learn manhood by painful discipline from their early years; we live without restraint, but are no less ready to sally forth and face the self-same perils. . . .

'We are art-lovers without being spendthrifts, philosophers without being weaklings. We treat wealth as a means to activity rather than to display: it is no disgrace to confess poverty, but only to acquiesce in it. We devote our energies alike to private and public affairs . . . If one of us takes no interest in politics, we do not say, as others do, "He minds his own business", but "He is no use". And we who take the decisions also thresh out the issues, in the belief that deeds are not spoilt by words but rather by lack of preliminary discussion. . . .

'In short, I maintain that the city as a whole is an education to Hellas and the citizens severally, in versatility and variety of accomplishment, afford a type of the self-complete individual.' (Thucydides, ii, 37-41.)

*The Experiment Fails (432-338 B.C.)*

The Funeral Oration commemorates the death not of a few citizens but of a civilization. Two years earlier the outbreak of war between the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League had ushered in a century of embittered strife, in which Athens, Sparta and Thebes in turn aimed at Panhellenic supremacy and were in turn defeated by the combination of the others. We see the later years of the 5th Century no longer through the rose-tinted spectacles of Herodotus but through the grey anti-dazzle lenses of Thucydides, and the effect is almost as though we had dropped a novel by Dickens and picked up one by Hardy. The experiment in freedom has failed. Political freedom has broken the rule of the best (*aristocracy*), and power has fallen to the worst. Intellectual freedom has taken away fear of the gods and respect for tradition; and it is taken for granted that men are actuated solely by self-interest. Though he writes with the impartiality of the scientific thinker and the cynicism of the disappointed idealist, Thucydides unostentatiously points a moral which he may have learnt from the great tragedians: despite all the injustice and suffering in the world, the facts do not quite bear out that comforting doctrine of the survival of the most ruthless. As the Hebrew prophets saw the very suffering of Jehovah's people as proof of His power, so the Greek thinker saw in the collapse of his ideals a proof of their validity. What had gone wrong was that men had not lived up to them.

However much Thucydides may exaggerate this moral decline, we have independent evidence that it really took place. He himself attributes it to the growing bitterness of the class war.<sup>1</sup>

'The effects of the class war were such as they always will be so long as human nature remains the same; only its intensity and its manifestations vary with circumstances. In peace and prosperity cities and individuals alike are more amiably disposed; war, which takes away the easy satisfaction of daily wants, is a forceful schoolmaster, drilling the tempers of the multitude into conformity with what they experience. As the disturbance spread, it gained momentum from reported precedents for the transformation of men's minds by ingenuity of stratagem and novelty of reprisals. The accustomed relations between words and things were altered: frantic bravado passed for comradely gallantry, provident hesitation for cowardice in disguise, virtue for the weakling's mask and general prudence for all-round slackness.<sup>1</sup> . . . Ties of blood ranked below ties of party, which, with less circumspection in adventuring, bound men to work for mutual benefit in a confederacy not sanctified by divine law but cemented by shared illegality. . . . The leaders on both sides were full of fine phrases—"equal rights (*isonomia*) among citizens", or "disciplined aristocracy"; but, while professing to foster the public interests, they turned them to private perquisites.' (iii, 82.)

The men who caused this social unrest were moved, like all revolutionaries, partly by the pressure of material needs, partly by the impact of new ideas. Hellas never succeeded in banishing 'her foster-sister Poverty'<sup>2</sup> very far from her door. And poverty meant not what we should call a low standard of living but downright starvation. In the 5th Century it was no longer possible, except on a small scale, to get rid of surplus mouths by sending out colonies. The Athenians supported a growing population on the tribute paid by their 'allies' and the profits of their export trade. But tribute could only be extorted from subjects

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Han Fei-Tze 47 (in A. Waley: *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 215): 'Those who further the private interests of old friends are called "staunch", those who distribute largesses out of the public funds are called "kind men" [etc.]'

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus vii, 103.

held down by force, and Athenian exports could not expand indefinitely except at the expense of trade rivals (Megara, Corinth, etc.). Here were good grounds, both within the Greek cities and in their mutual relations, for quarrels whose sordid motives could not easily be cloaked by fine talk about patriotism and liberty. At any rate, the 5th-Century Greeks were too wide awake to accept such talk at its face value. As in all ages when men have been learning to think more clearly, they had become more fully conscious of human aspirations and of human realities, and were horrified at the gulf between the two. So their mood of exaltation was followed by one of disillusionment: if all other virtues were eyewash, they would take refuge in the intellectual honesty that made no pretence to disinterested conduct.

The climax of Thucydides' tragedy is the Athenian expedition against Syracuse (415 B.C.), which set forth with high hopes of founding a new empire in the West and ended in irretrievable disaster. After 410 the tale is taken up by Xenophon. But, when his son was killed in the battle of Mantinea (362 B.C.), he laid down his pen in despair.

'The outcome of this battle was contrary to all expectation. For, with almost the whole of Hellas drawn up in opposing ranks, no one doubted that the victors would rule and the vanquished become subject. But God so wrought that . . . both sides claimed the victory and neither was a whit better off in land or city or empire after the battle than before, but the indecision and confusion throughout Hellas were even greater than before. Thus far let my writing stand; what happened afterwards may perhaps interest some other.' (*Greek History*, vii, 5.)

The interminable indecisive wars of the 4th Century have indeed relatively little interest for world history. The chief combatants are no longer free citizens risking their lives for an ideal, but highly trained professional mercenaries. Military equipment and tactics were becoming more specialized. The ordinary citizen was growing more reluctant to sacrifice the increasing comforts of civilian life at the call of patriotism. There was a growing consciousness that war does not pay, which apparently found a spokesman in Xenophon himself, old soldier though he was.

'Would it not be a good idea to appoint officials to be known as Keepers of the Peace, whose duty it would be to keep this city [Athens] on friendly terms with all men? If any think that by remaining at peace this city will be less powerful and glorious in Hellas, their view seems to me quite erroneous. For of course those cities are called happiest which remain longest at peace, and of all cities Athens has most to gain by peace. For what class would not rather see the city at peace, beginning with seamen and traders? What of those who are rich in corn or wine or oil or flocks? Those who live by their brains or their capital? Craftsmen and *sophists* and philosophers and poets and all who have dealings with them? Lovers of religious celebrations that delight eye or ear? Or even those with much to buy or to sell quickly? And where would you find more of all these than at Athens?

'If any, admitting this, still think the city has more chance of regaining her leadership by war, let them remember the Persian affair, and ask whether it was by doing violence to the Greeks or by conferring benefits that we won our leadership and our navy and our stewardship of the common revenues. And, when the city was shorn of her empire by what seemed the excessive harshness of her rule, was it not when we stayed our hands from wrongdoing that the islanders again put themselves voluntarily under our protection? . . . And now, if, instead of joining in the war, you strove by sending

round delegations to reconcile the Greeks with one another so that peace might prevail over land and sea, I am confident that every state in Hellas would value the welfare of Athens second only to its own.'

'If anyone thinks that more money comes into the city in war than in peace, he will find the evidence of history against him.

'If you ask, "Ought we to keep peace with those who wrong the city?" I should answer: "No. But we should punish our enemies far more speedily if we gave no handle to the wrong-doer. For they would then have no ally."' (Xenophon (?): *Ways and Means* [355 B.C.], 5.)

And here is the eloquent (but not unbiased) testimony of Demosthenes.

'The Athenians of those days, who were not coaxed and cajoled by their politicians as you are, were willingly accepted as rulers by the Greeks for over 45 years<sup>1</sup> . . . Fighting their own battles, in the infantry or the navy, they won many glorious victories and alone of all men left a reputation beyond the reach of calumny . . . For public profit they embellished the city with a splendour of temples and temple offerings that after ages cannot hope to outdo. But in their private affairs they were so unassuming and so true to the spirit (*éthos*) of the constitution that, if any of you actually knows the house of Aristides or Miltiades or any of their illustrious contemporaries, he will see that it is no more imposing than its neighbours. For they did not take up politics with an eye to personal gain, but only to the common welfare. Since they acted thus loyally towards the Greeks, piously towards the gods and fairly among themselves, it is hardly surprising that their fortunes flourished. . . . But, my dear fellow (I can hear you protest), if we have lost our conquests a broad, we are at least better off at home. Better off how? In our white-washed battlements, our nicely kept roads, our drinking fountains and such trash? Only look at the politicians to whom you owe these blessings! Note how some have risen from beggary to affluence, some from obscurity to fame, and some have built themselves houses more imposing than the public buildings. As the city's fortunes have shrunk, so have theirs expanded. Why is it that all went well then and now goes so ill? Because then the people (*demos*) did not hesitate to act and fight for itself and so was master—and paymaster—of the politicians, who were grateful for any share in office and authority and emolument; now, it is the politicians who are paymasters, and you—the people—crippled and beggared of money and allies, are delighted if you are treated to a holiday dole or a gay procession and (as a crowning proof of your manhood!) are grateful to your benefactors for giving you a share of your own.' (*Third Olynthiac* [349 B.C.], 24–31.)

We may sympathize with these peace-loving citizens, who were satisfied if the state looked after their water supply and other amenities and left them to live their own lives; but we must acknowledge that they were no longer truly citizens, in the Greek sense. And we may wonder what sort of resistance they would have put up to the armies of Xerxes.

The Persian Empire in the 4th Century, however, was in no position to launch a great invasion against anyone. It had profited indeed by the collapse of Athens to recover some of its lost possessions. By the King's Peace (386 B.C.) Artaxerxes II was recognized as overlord of the Greek cities of Asia Minor: perhaps after their experience of 'freedom' as allies of Athens or Sparta, with its accompaniment of war and civil strife, they were not sorry to settle down again under what seemed to be a strong government. It was not, however, as strong as it seemed. The

<sup>1</sup> The great days of the Athenian Empire have already become idealized.

royal authority was being undermined by the inherent weaknesses of Oriental despotism—disputed successions, palace intrigues, petticoat government, and general corruption and inefficiency—and it was increasingly difficult to assert it in outlying provinces. A Greek, Euagoras, ruled for some time as prince of Cyprus and even made conquests in Phoenicia. Egypt regained its independence under the last dynasties of native Pharaohs. The Near East seemed to be slipping back into the chaos from which it had been rescued by the strong hand of Cyrus and Darius.

### *Free Thought and its Problems*

We have traced the city-state, as a practical way of ordering men's lives, to its crowning achievement in the Athens of Pericles, and have noted the beginnings of its decline. If we wish to retrace our steps and study the city, with its associated ideals of liberty and law, as a force in men's minds, we must turn back to a point far remote from Athens or democracy—remote indeed from anything that we can easily recognize as reality.

We broke off the thread of Greek thought with Heraclitus of Ephesus, whose doctrine of perpetual flux appeared to have made thought an impossibility, since it left nothing for the mind to grasp. It may have been in conscious opposition that an Italian Greek of the early 5th Century, Parmenides of Elea, formulated the diametrically opposite theory in verse much less poetical than Heraclitus' prose and even more obscure. Tackling, like his predecessors, the question 'What is?', he appears to have taken as his starting-point the unexceptionable answer: 'That which is, is; that which is not, is not.' From this, by a logical process which we need not hope to follow, he draws some startling conclusions.

Thinking is one with the thing that is thought of; else you would find it  
Sundered from that-which-is, from that wherein it is uttered.  
Other than that-which-is, and apart, is nothing nor will be.  
Fate has ordained it whole, immovable; wherefore it follows  
All those things that men have supposed and taken for real  
Are but a name—Birth, Passing-away, Not-being, or Being,  
Shifting-from-place-to-place or Changing-in-visible-colour. (viii, 34-41.)

So we arrive at a universe that is whole without parts, homogeneous, eternal, unchangeable, motionless, finite (but with nothing outside it) and spherical (since there is no reason why it should extend further in one direction than in another). The 'way of persuasion' can lead only to this metaphysical Sparta or Croton, in which everything is sacrificed to unity and stability. If our deceitful senses appear to reveal a world full of variety and change, so much the worse for them!

It is easy to dismiss Parmenides as a mere quibbler, misled by a misunderstanding of the verb *to be*, or to tax him with inventing out of his own mental processes a world as fictitious as that world of magic which the savage builds out of his hopes and fears. But the absolute reality for which he was seeking was not just a refuge from a philosopher's nightmare; it was a rock of certainty in the political and moral quicksands of this age of freedom—a doubt-proof foundation for the new fabric of social and individual life. If (as has been said) the use of metaphysics is to correct bad metaphysics, Parmenides might claim that he laid bare at least two impossible assumptions that had underlain the thought of his predecessors. If space is discontinuous, a mere succession of points, as the Pythagoreans taught, how is it possible to get from one point to another? If everything consists of water or some other single substance, as the Ionians taught, how is it that we can distinguish, for instance, between wine and oil? The Greeks never really came to grips with the problem of reconciling continuity with movement and change: they never worked out the mathematics of the calculus, and they regularly thought of animals as belonging to fixed species and of men



as belonging to societies that were static by nature (though they recognized the possibility of sudden 'mutations' from one kind of society to another). They were more acutely conscious of the kindred problem of 'the one and the many'—the relation between the diverse elements that together make up one coherent reality (or between the individual citizens and the community or city).

The abstract questions posed by Parmenides might not in themselves have bothered anybody. But Greek thinkers felt bound to lay these spectres one way or another before they could solve certain urgent practical problems. First, for the advancement of natural science (especially physiology, which was beginning to attract particular interest), it was necessary to give some account of certain familiar phenomena involving variety and change—*e.g.* to suggest how that which entered the cow as grass can come out as milk. Secondly, in order to carry conviction by argument (an important matter in democratic states), it was necessary to draw the line between valid and invalid reasoning. Thirdly, it was imperative to find something in reality corresponding to the traditional distinction between 'good' and 'bad' conduct, which the new learning threatened to obliterate. From the physical problem, the focus of interest passed to the more strictly human problems of logic and ethics.<sup>1</sup>

#### (i) *The Problem of Matter*

If reality could not be explained as consisting of one stuff, perhaps it could be better accounted for by the interaction of two stuffs (or 'natures', or 'forces'). A notable exponent of this type of theory was the Pythagorean Alcmaeon of Croton, a pioneer of anatomy. His study of the human body seemed to confirm the view, already suggested by Anaximander and Heracleitus, that the universe, and more especially the body politic, was kept in being by a harmony of opposites.

'Bodily health is preserved by *isonomy* of the powers, wet, dry, cold, hot, bitter, sweet, and the rest. Monarchy among these is the cause of sickness: for the monarchy of one is the destruction of the other [i.e. 'of the opposite']. Sickness springs from excess: as to the whereby, by excess of heat or cold; as to the wherefrom, from superfluity or lack of food; as to the wherein, in blood or marrow or brain. It takes its rise in these some times from outside causes also, from particular kinds of water or soil or exertion or constraint or the like. But health is a mixture of the kinds in due proportion.' (4.)

This is a rough statement of the medical theory that prevailed down to modern times, according to which the varieties of physical and mental constitution are due to different mixtures (or 'temperaments') of four juices (or 'humours'), the black bile (*melancholy*) of the spleen, the yellow bile (*choler*) of the liver, the blood and the phlegm. These four 'humours' corresponded to the four 'elements' or primary stuffs—earth, air, fire and water—of which the world was composed.<sup>2</sup>

The 'four elements' were first singled out from the pairs of opposites and made the basis of a coherent system by the Sicilian Empedocles, author of a poem *On Nature* of which extensive fragments survive. He coupled with them another pair of opposites which he seems to have conceived (if we may try to translate his thought into modern language) as equally forms of matter but as having a sort of catalytic action. The world thus consists of six ingredients:

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare the shift of focus in the science of the last three centuries from physics and chemistry through biology to psychology and sociology—a shift accompanied by a comparable change in the structure of society (*cf.* J. Macmurray: *The Boundaries of Science* [1939], p. 55). Possibly this corresponds to a normal tendency in the development of the individual mind.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* the remarkably similar theory of the Indian materialists (above, p. 102).

Fire and Water and Earth and Ether aloft, unresisting;  
 Strife moreover, to all things fatal, not to be suffered;  
 All these and Love besides, in length and width corresponding . . .  
 All things in Anger are parted, and kind from kind is dissevered;  
 All are united in Love, and one yearns after another. (xvii, 18-20; xxi, 7-8.)

The history of the universe is a rhythmic alternation of Love and Strife, like the *yin* and *yang* of Chinese thought. During the creative phases, dominated by Love, there is evolved a cosmos inhabited by harmonious forms of life, the unfit being eliminated by natural selection. During the destructive phases, such as that in which the philosopher himself had the misfortune to live, the world slips back into chaos. But throughout the process there reigns what we should call 'the law of the conservation of mass'. Like most Greek philosophers, Empedocles believed in a complete and self-contained universe, uncreated and everlasting. His political experience as a champion of democracy may have taught him that Strife (in which Heracleitus had found the ruling principle of the universe) must be balanced by some principle of cohesion. His many-sided character included something of the revivalist preacher and something of the old-style 'medicine man', but his influence on the development of scientific medicine was also considerable—and not always beneficial.

The Greeks, at least in Ionia, were outgrowing the world-wide belief that disease is sent by the gods as a punishment for sin; and, as early as Homer, they had adopted ways of treating it that were almost free from any hint of magic. It is true that many sanctuaries, especially those sacred to Aesculapius, god of healing, were renowned for miraculous cures produced more by faith than by treatment. But the brotherhood or guild in the island of Cos who called themselves 'Sons of Aesculapius' rejected any connexion between the healing art and religion. Though precluded from direct knowledge of micro-organisms, they treated diseases in practice as living species, each recognizable by its own specific characters. This attitude seems to us so obvious that it requires an effort to realize what a revolution in thought it meant at the time. It is amply illustrated in the collection of medical treatises, apparently emanating from the library of Cos, that passes under the name of Hippocrates, a celebrated physician of the late 5th Century. In the Hippocratic treatise *On Airs, Waters and Places* (an account of the influence of environment on human physique and character) the author has occasion to mention the belief that a certain disease is 'god-sent' or 'divine'. He comments:

'I agree that this disease is divine, as are all others, none being more divine or more human than another. Each of them has its own nature, and none happens apart from nature.' (22.)

The Hippocratics hoped to discover in time, by trial and error, the rule of life that would best enable the patient to withstand each specific ailment. But the path of experience was long and laborious. To many minds the 'philosophic' method of deduction from a few general principles seemed to promise a short cut to success. This was opposed by 'Hippocrates' in a treatise *On Ancient Medicine* (c. 430-420 B.C.).

'Those who, in speaking or writing of the healing art, have based their reasoning on a *hypothesis*,<sup>1</sup> the hot or the cold, the wet or the dry, or what they will, narrowing down the causes of human diseases or death to one or two, are confounded by their own words. For there already exists an art of

<sup>1</sup> This does not mean precisely a 'hypothesis' in the modern sense, but suggests an unquestioned assumption like the 'postulates' of mathematics.

healing, whose practitioners, like those of other arts, attain to varying degrees of experience and skill. I cannot see why it should need an empty *hypothesis*, like those obscure studies of things in heaven or under the earth whose results cannot be verified. Medicine has its starting-point and its method, whereby much has been discovered in the course of ages and the rest will be discovered, so long as a competent enquirer familiar with previous discoveries takes his start from them.<sup>1</sup> Whoever rejects these and seeks to advance by another road is a victim of delusion. Men were driven by necessity to discover the healing art, because the diet and way of life that suited the healthy did not suit the sick. Even before that, the diet of healthy men had itself to be discovered. For I suppose that originally men ate the same food as cattle and horses—wild fruits, shrubs and grasses—and suffered the same ill effects as they would now from this potent and brutish diet, except that they were presumably somewhat inured to it by custom. Therefore they sought out and discovered food in harmony with their nature, which we now use. They took wheat, steeped and winnowed it, sifted and kneaded and baked it, and at length made bread. And many other things, by tempering the strong and the unmixed with the weaker, they moulded to man's nature and power. This was the beginning of medicine. And to this day there are some Barbarians and even Greeks who regulate their lives at pleasure in sickness as in health. But others have advanced the art further by discovering that weaker foods, such as slops, are in general better for invalids. In practice the physician's task is far more complicated than this. For he must aim at some measure: and he has no measure or number or standard to refer to except bodily feeling. So, if he comes so near the mark as to make only a slight error this way or that, he seems to me worthy of all praise. . . .

'Let us return to those enquirers who follow the new method of *hypothesis*, arguing that, if a man is hurt by something hot or cold or dry or wet, the opposite must be applied as a remedy. Suppose a man not naturally robust is suffering pain and weakness because his diet consists of wheat straight from the threshing floor, raw meat and water. The surest way to restore him to health is to give him bread, boiled meat and wine. But are we to say that the baker has taken from the wheat the hot or the cold or the dry or the wet? He has in fact changed it in various ways by processes which have each their own nature and power. . . . I cannot imagine how these theorists apply their *hypothesis* in practice. For they have not, I fancy, discovered the hot or the cold or the dry or the wet, itself by itself, sharing in no other 'form'. So they must either talk rubbish or use some of the things we know, which have other powers besides these four. . . .

'Certain physicians and *sophists* declare that it is not possible to know medicine without first knowing what man is. Their reasoning inclines towards philosophy, such as what Empedocles and others have written about nature, what man is from the beginning, how he came into being and of what materials he is built up—all of which seems to me to belong less to the art of the healer than to that of the imaginative artist. For I think that nothing certain can be learnt about nature except from medicine. And all this investigation (*historiê*) of what man is, and why, falls far short of such knowledge.' (1-20.)

From this medical literature we learn not only that the Greeks were far from enjoying that perpetual radiant health which is sometimes supposed to have been

<sup>1</sup> This passage is almost unique in ancient literature as implying a belief in future progress. J. B. Bury (*History of the Idea of Progress*) finds only one example of this belief in a Classical writer (Seneca).

theirs by nature, but also that, in at least one branch of science, they had developed a sound and promising technique of observation and classification, embodied in a fairly precise technical language. They lacked, however, a full appreciation of the value of experiment—though the author of *Airs, Waters and Places*, for instance, describes a simple experiment to prove that ice loses bulk by evaporation. They also lacked the instruments invented in modern times to aid observation and measurement. And they lacked the guidance of some working hypothesis less fanciful and less unduly simplified than those so far suggested. This last, if they had known how to use it, lay ready to their hands in the theory of *atoms*.

Those who postulated a small number of distinct 'elements' sacrificed the unity demanded by man's reason without adequately accounting for the diversity apparently revealed by his senses. The logical difficulty which had puzzled Parmenides is more lucidly expressed by his disciple Melissus, who also (perhaps unintentionally) suggested a way out:

'If there were many, they would have to be such as I say the one is. For if there are earth and water and air and fire and iron and gold and living and dead and black and white, all which things men declare to be real, and if we see and hear rightly, each of these must needs be such as it seemed to us at first, and not become different, but be always itself . . . But it seems to us that hot becomes cold and cold hot, hard becomes soft and soft hard, the living dies and comes to birth out of the not-living, and all these things are transformed, and what was and what now is are nowise alike, but iron being hard is worn away with the finger in the same flow, and gold likewise and stone and whatever else seems to be hard, and out of water are born earth and stone. . . . It follows that we did not see rightly, nor did those many rightly seem to be: else they would not have changed, had they been real, but each would have been just such as it seemed. For nothing is stronger than that which really is. But, if it changes, then a being thing has perished and a not-being thing has come to be. Thus, therefore, if there were many, they would have to be such as the one is.' (8.)

This suggestion was taken up by Leucippus and elaborated by Democritus. Suppose the world is composed of a multitude of units, each (like the universe of Parmenides) homogeneous, unalterable and 'unsplittable' (*atomos*). We should still have to mistrust our senses, which do not show us these *atoms*. And the mind, Democritus tells us, cannot overthrow the senses from which it derives its beliefs without sharing in the overthrow. It may, however, accept the 'bastard knowledge' they impart as a conventional misinterpretation of the illusory effect produced by mass movements of the imperceptible particles in empty space.

'Sweet and bitter, hot and cold and colour, are by convention; in truth are atoms and void.' (vi.)

The atoms are all made of the same stuff, but vary greatly in size and shape; the number of kinds is large, but not infinite. Democritus explains fluids as loose assemblages of rounded atoms, compact bodies as tangled masses of rough or hooked atoms; and on similar lines he accounts for an immense range of phenomena, from the Milky Way to the Nile floods.

The atomic theory, especially as later modified by Epicurus, had a considerable vogue in antiquity; but its value as a working hypothesis for the study of the material universe was not recognized till the 17th Century.<sup>1</sup> Modern chemists

<sup>1</sup> Modern physical science may be said to start from a declaration of Galileo (*Il Saggiatore*, 1624), which closely echoes Democritus: 'I do not believe that there exists anything in external bodies to excite tastes, smells and sounds, but size, shape, quantity and motion.' Galileo, however, relied on experiment to prove his theory.

still find it helpful, though physicists have been thrown back by the 'splitting of the unsplitable' into something more like the flux of Heraclitus. Ancient scientists never fully grasped the method of systematic experiment guided by working hypotheses. They fought shy of the doctrine of Democritus, because it seemed to commit them to acceptance of a world governed by mechanical 'necessity', a world in which mind or soul existed only in the form of peculiarly fine and mobile particles of matter. Democritus himself did not draw what might seem the inevitable inference that men are helpless puppets of material forces. He believed that he had an important contribution to make to the moral problems that were agitating his contemporaries. Here too he distinguished sharply between the conflicting testimony of the senses and the underlying reality discoverable by reason:

'For all men the same thing is good and true; but one thing is pleasant to one, another to another.' (60.)

Since it requires practice and training to get behind the appearance to the reality, Democritus (like Hsün-Tze) believed in a civilized or artificial society rather than in the natural man, who does what appears to him pleasant.

'Nature and education are akin: for education remodels the man, and remodelling him makes his nature [or 'does the work of nature']. . . . More men become good by training than by nature.' (33; 242.)

An even richer multiplicity in the raw materials of the universe is assumed in the ingenious theory of Anaxagoras. There are in reality as many different things as there seem to be. They change their appearance because 'There is in everything a portion of everything' (6) and 'Everything is and was most manifestly those things of which it has most in it (12)'. No one apparently has ever understood this theory well enough either to refute or to adopt it. But one feature of it has been of lasting importance in European thought. Anaxagoras supposed that the natural and primitive condition of the universe would be one in which all its ingredients were mixed together in one indistinguishable lump. To explain how the mass was set moving and the ingredients partly sorted out, he supposed that there was one restless element (comparable to Empedocles' Love and Strife) which refused to combine with the rest. This he called 'mind' (*nous*). He does not seem to have gone on from this to elaborate a detailed psychology. But he took the first step in a decisive reorientation of Greek thought. Hitherto philosophers had been trying to understand the world as it might exist irrespective of its human inhabitants. Henceforth it interests them more and more explicitly as the theatre of human effort or the object of human contemplation—though the Greeks never went so far as to speculate (as the Hindus did) on whether it might not in fact be a mere product of human imagination.

It is significant that this first step was taken by one who was both the last of the great Ionians and the first philosopher of note to take up his abode at Athens—the first-fruits of that intellectual tribute which was beginning to pour in to the imperial city, the 'council-chamber of Hellas', where social and moral questions had been in the air since the days of Solon and were being tackled afresh by the tragedians. Anaxagoras became the intimate friend of Pericles and probably helped to inspire his political ideal. At the instigation of rival politicians, he was banished from Athens on a charge of 'impiety'. His assailants appealed to strong conservative prejudices against disquieting and possibly dangerous thoughts. But there were others at Athens who were ready to welcome new ideas, confident that they could meet their challenge as they had met the hosts of Xerxes. In

the general prosperity there were plenty of young fellows with money to burn who were eager for an education more stimulating and up to date than the traditional training in gymnastics, music, Homer and the laws of Solon. Many of them hoped also to further their political career by a fuller mastery of language and a better understanding of human character and institutions. Hitherto Athens had been a cultural backwater. Now it attracted, as professional teachers, exponents of the latest ideas from all the more go-ahead parts of the Greek world, especially Ionia and the West. These teachers came to be known as *sophists* ('wisdom specialists'), a word often tinged with the plain man's contempt for the intellectual. In Aeschylus the Spirit of Violence gives this title to Prometheus, as one who had been too clever by half; and it is in much the same spirit that the sceptic Lucian, more than five centuries later, applies it to Christ.

(ii) *Problems of the Human Element.*

The philosophers had early summed up the object of their studies in the word *physis* ('nature', 'the way things grow'). They had agreed in the main that *physis* was a single universal reality, not normally subject to the capricious intervention of gods but behaving in regular and predictable ways. As their attention gradually became focused on 'the proper study of mankind' they assigned to the human body a place in this universal *physis*—though it was not till later that those who studied its behaviour usurped the title of *physicians* or *physiologists*. When they turned in the same enquiring spirit to examine human institutions—language, law, politics, religion, ethics—they expected to find that these also were 'natural', i.e. universal and operating according to fixed rules. Herodotus tells of a king who marooned some infants on a desert island in the hope of discovering the 'natural language' of mankind. And the historian's contemporaries were beginning to seek, as men have never ceased to do, for 'natural' religion, the 'natural' form of society and 'natural' standards of behaviour.

But the quest for pure human nature, as we found in the opening chapter of this volume, is not an easy one. Men speak different languages, worship different gods and obey different laws or customs—the Greeks used the word *nomos*, 'customary law', without at first clearly distinguishing the two ideas of 'what must be done' and 'what always is done'. To men living in a primitive society, bound by rigid taboos and ignorant of foreign customs and the 'laws of nature', their own customary law seems the most 'natural' and stable thing in a mysterious and capricious universe. The expression 'laws of nature' records the Greek discovery that the non-human world is in fact as orderly as human society. This was followed by a further discovery, exemplified by Herodotus' story of Xerxes' Indian troops who were accustomed to eat their deceased parents in token of filial respect and were as much shocked by the Greek custom of cremation as the Greeks were by cannibalism. So much for the unwritten laws that are universally revered (above, pp. 215 and 209)! Evidently 'right' and 'wrong', which seem so clear within the boundaries of a single society, have no meaning outside it. All such matters are ruled by *nomos*. They lie outside the realm of *physis* altogether.

Having convinced themselves that there existed this dividing line between the 'natural' and the 'artificial' or 'conventional', men fell to disputing as to where exactly it should be drawn. For Democritus, nature consisted simply of impenetrable atoms moving in empty space and with only the purely mathematical properties of size, shape and position; differences in temperature, taste and colour (or what were later styled 'secondary qualities') existed only by 'convention' (*nomos*). At the opposite pole were those who maintained that not only did these 'secondary qualities' somehow exist in nature but their very names ('heat' and 'cold', 'black' and 'white') were those that 'naturally' belonged to them. This is no doubt the primitive conception of language, and the basis of the Confucian

theory of the 'right relation' between names and things.<sup>1</sup> The question is thrashed out in Plato's *Cratylus*, where the sophist Hermogenes is represented as saying:

'Cratylus says that to each existing thing there belongs its right name as a natural growth; and a name is not a fraction of men's utterance by which they agree to denote something, but there is a rightness of names, the same for all, Greek and Barbarian alike. . . . After discussion with many, I am not convinced that there is any other rightness of a name than compact and agreement. For it seems to me that, whatever name any man chooses to give to anything, that is its right name, and he is at liberty to change it like the name of his slave. For a name has not grown in attachment to anything by nature, but it exists by the convention (*nomos*) and habit of those who habitually use it.' (383-384.)

One reason why the Greeks found this 'conventional' theory of language disturbing was because they had more difficulty than we have in distinguishing between the two notions (both covered by their word *logos*) of 'speech' and 'thought expressed in speech'. They lacked the familiarity with foreign languages that makes such a distinction relatively easy. They thus found it hard to understand how, if the names of abstract qualities are just what men have agreed to make them, the qualities themselves can be distinct objects of thought. This type of confusion is still very general. We are all apt to assume that, if we know the name of a thing, we need not enquire further what it is or whether it is anything at all. And many of our troubles are certainly due to quarrelling about names without appreciating the moral of the *Cratylus* (439) that 'things cannot be known from their names, but only by a study of what they actually are'.

Then as now, this dispute about words had an important bearing on practical politics. The extreme views did not matter much. It was not easy to extend the realm of Nature so far as to embrace language. In seeking to extend the rival kingdom of Convention so far as to include colour and taste, the atomists could indeed argue that a sick man may see yellow where a healthy man sees white or taste bitter where a healthy man tastes sweet. But, if these secondary qualities exist only by convention, the convention is so nearly universal that it is virtually equivalent to nature.<sup>2</sup> The territory seriously in dispute between Nature and Convention was the region of what are now called 'values'—right and wrong, good and bad, fair and foul. If one man sees cremation as 'good' and cannibalism as 'bad', and another sees the two qualities reversed, who is to say which is the sick man and which the healthy? It is hard to dispute the assertion of Archelaus, an Athenian pupil of Anaxagoras, that 'Right and wrong are not by nature but by convention'.<sup>3</sup> This view was summed up by the sophist Protagoras in the epigram 'Man is the measure of all things', which Plato interprets as meaning 'Things are to me as they appear to me, and to you as they appear to you' and consequently 'There is no such thing as a bad man'.

If we believe that these values are purely man-made, we may still say (to borrow a simile from Maeterlinck) that man was sent to make justice in a world where no justice was, as the bee was sent to sweeten a world that had else been honeyless. This was substantially the line taken by Protagoras himself. Though the judgement of a healthy man about taste is no truer or wiser than that of a sick man, yet, he argues, the condition of the healthy man is preferable. So the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 33, 40, 125 n. and 216 n.

<sup>2</sup> In the Hippocratic treatise *On the Nature of Man* (l. 354) it is argued that the bodily 'humours' really exist because 'As to *nomos*, they have distinct names; as to *physis*, they appear different to sight and touch; so that they must have distinct "forms" (*ideai*) and powers.' Cf. below, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the saying of the Sceptic, Pyrrho (died c. 270 B.C.): 'Men do everything by *nomos* and custom (*ethos*).'

sophist, with speech for medicine, can improve his pupil's condition. Justice is a convention established by normal healthy men with beneficial results. Protagoras is represented by Plato as illustrating his theory of society, far more democratic and equalitarian than Plato's own, by a fable of the Creation. To every creature was given its own way of life and the powers needed for living it. When it came to man's turn, there was nothing left.

'Then Prometheus, seeing man naked and unshod, couchless and weaponless, stole from Hephaistos and Athené fire and the wisdom of the craftsman. But the wisdom of the citizen he could not give; for it lay in the well guarded citadel of Zeus.

Since man had a share of the divine portion, he alone of animals worshipped<sup>1</sup> gods and set up altars and images. And by his craftsmanship he articulated speech and names and produced houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and food from the earth. Thus equipped, men dwelt at first in scattered settlements; for there were no cities. Then, since their craftsmanship did not avail to protect them against wild beasts—for the art of war is a part of citizenship [or 'civilization'] not of craftsmanship—they sought safety by congregating and founding cities. But, lacking the art of citizenship, they wronged one another, and so scattered again. Zeus therefore, fearing lest our race might perish, sent Hermes bearing Conscience (*Aidōs*) and Right to be the accomplishments of cities and the cement of society.

'"Shall I allot them," asked Hermēs, "like the art of healing or other arts, so that one specialist suffices for many unskilled?"

'"No!" answered Zeus. "Let all share in them alike: else there could be no cities [*i.e.* no civilization]. And enact a law (*nomos*) by my authority that any man who cannot share in Conscience and Right be put to death as a plague to the city.'" (Plato: *Protagoras*, 321-322 [condensed].)

In this fable the gods are purely symbolic: Protagoras held that man's life was too short and his powers too feeble to know what the gods are like or whether they exist at all. But, in making Law emanate from Zeus, he clearly intends to exalt it above Nature.

On the other hand, the typical sophist, as he appears in Plato's dialogues, affects to despise conventional morality and exalts what he conceives to be Nature. Here, for instance, is a sample attributed to a pupil of the sophists, a realist politician of the new school:

'By nature what is worse is also more shameful, so that it is more shameful to suffer wrong than to do it; but by law (*nomos*) it is more shameful to do wrong. To suffer wrong is the lot of the slave, who cannot protect himself or those he cares for. The laws were made in their own interest by the weak, who are also the many; they distribute praise and blame with a view to scaring off the stronger from appropriating the bigger share. That is why law calls this shameful and wrong, while nature would proclaim that it is right for the better to have a bigger share than the worse, and the stronger than the weaker. By what right did Xerxes invade Greece and his father attack the Scythians and others do the like? Surely, by the right of nature, and by a law indeed, but only the law of nature.' (Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, 483 [condensed].)

Plato has been accused of caricaturing sophistic theory, but his testimony is borne out by a recently discovered fragment of the sophist Antiphon *On Truth* (or 'Reality'):

<sup>1</sup> The word here used for 'worship' (*nomizo*) means literally 'to treat in the way prescribed by *nomos*'.



'Justice means not transgressing any of the laws of the city of which a man is citizen . . . A man would use justice with most profit to himself if before witnesses he revered the laws but away from witnesses the rules of nature. For the rules of the laws are accidental, those of nature compulsory; the former are made by agreement, the latter have grown of themselves. The man who transgresses the laws, in so far as he escapes detection by those who framed the agreement, escapes both shame and punishment. But, if anyone oversteps the limits of the possible, as fixed by the rules that have grown with the growth of nature, his penalty is the same whether he be detected or no; for it is determined not by opinion but by truth. . . . Most of the acts approved by law are inimical to nature. Law has prescribed for the eyes what to see and what not to see . . . for the tongue what to say and what not to say, for the hands what to do and what not to do . . . and for the mind what to desire and what not to desire. Now the things from which the laws turn men away have no less fellowship and affinity with nature than those they turn men towards . . . [The laws approve] those who only defend themselves when attacked and never make the first move, and those who treat their parents well even when ill treated by them . . . In such conduct there would be found many things inimical to nature—more pain, less pleasure, more endurance, than there is any need for. If in return for such concessions the law afforded any protection, there would be some advantage in obedience. But legal justice is powerless to prevent suffering and wrongdoing in the first instance, and there is no guarantee that it will give eventual redress . . .

[For the nobly born] we have respect and veneration, but not for those of lowly birth. In this we behave barbarously to one another, since by nature we are all alike, whether Barbarian or Greek . . . for we all alike breathe air through mouth and nostrils.'

Teachers like Antiphon, by their criticism of legal procedure and their insistence on social and racial equality, made a positive contribution to civilization. But their chief effect was negative. Recognizing no rule of nature but the survival of the fittest, they provided a theoretical justification for that policy of ruthless 'realism' whose practical effects stand starkly revealed in the pages of Thucydides.

Greek thought had not been evolving in a rarefied atmosphere of pure intelligence. The sophists were living in the rancorous disillusioned world of the late 5th Century, embittered by class war and cut-throat commercial rivalry, and it was from this that they drew their uninspiring conception of nature. But they were also developing the speculations of their predecessors along quite logical lines towards one of those precipices that recur in the history of human thought, when there seems to be nothing ahead but sheer nihilism and intellectual suicide. It is as though the mind periodically exhausts the matter supplied to it by experience and seems destined to perish of inanition for want of something fresh to bite on.

We today are familiar with equally destructive speculations, which till recently we were apt to regard as divorced from practical life. The sophists, however, were not an ineffectual coterie of cranks. They numbered among their pupils the leading statesmen of the day, and their doctrines were seriously canvassed by the man in the street. In an excitable Greek democracy the most revolutionary theory, plausibly presented to an impressionable Assembly, might speedily become practical politics. What philosopher's dream could be more fantastic than the actual social structure of Sparta, which was at least believed to have sprung from the mind of a single thinker? The communism naïvely advocated by Aristophanes' heroine Lysistrata had its actual counterpart in such states as Lipara. Equalization of property was not only a logical ideal but a

common slogan of demagogues, and attempts were sometimes made to put it into practice, especially at the founding of a new colony. Colonies indeed gave an excellent opening to the doctrinaire. It is difficult to see how any society could have been based on naturalist theories like that of Antiphon. But Protagoras drew up the constitution of Thurii. And the architect Hippodamus, who laid out the plan of this colony in tidy rectangles, also itched to plan a whole social order on the same symmetrical pattern.

'Hippodamus of Miletus, the inventor of town-planning, who laid out the Piræus, adopted a somewhat extravagant mode of life from a love of notoriety, so that some thought him a bit of a crank, with his long hair and his costly ornaments worn over a cheap woollen garment, to which he clung even in the heat of summer. Wishing to be an adept over the whole field of nature, he was the first man other than a politician to discuss the best form of constitution. He devised his city with a population of 10,000 men, divided into three classes—craftsmen, husbandmen and soldiers. He also divided the land into thirds, one sacred, to maintain the worship of the gods, one public, to support the warriors, and one private, belonging to the husbandmen. . . . He made a law whereby those who invented anything of benefit to the city should receive recognition. And he enacted that the children of those who fell in battle should be kept by the state—as though this was something unprecedented, whereas the law exists already at Athens and elsewhere. The magistrates were to be appointed by the people (*demos*), which comprised the three classes, and to supervise the affairs of the community and of foreigners and of orphans. These are the most notable items of his programme.' (Aristotle: *Politics*, ii, 1267-1268.)

Hippodamus does not seem to have come seriously to grips with the problems raised by his ideal scheme. But he had the merit of being a constructive, if a superficial, thinker. In the main, the notions fashionable among the intelligentsia of the age were calculated, if put into practice, to break up the existing pattern of civilization without putting anything coherent in its place.

#### *New Foundations for the City*

How did the ordinary citizen react to this deafening barrage of new ideas, which not only shattered all that he had been taught about gods and men and the material universe but promised (or threatened) to transform the whole setting of his life? His mixed feelings have been dramatized by Aristophanes in *The Clouds* (423 B.C.). The hero of this comedy is an elderly Athenian of the old school who has had the misfortune to get into debt. He has heard that the sophists teach the art of 'making the worse case appear the better' (a claim actually made by Protagoras, among others), and it occurs to him that a touch of this art might help him out of a tight corner. So he betakes him to a Thinkery, where he finds one ingenious experimenter trying to find how many times the length of its own foot a flea can jump; other students are down on their knees researching in geology, while (by a convenient time-saving device) their behinds are simultaneously studying astronomy. The presiding genius of this busy scene is Socrates, immersed in profound cogitation as near as may be among the clouds—he is in a basket suspended from the ceiling. On returning to earth he attempts to initiate this hopeful enquirer into the mysteries of the new learning. But the worthy citizen does not get far beyond a hazy notion that Zeus has been dethroned and a new deity, *Whirl*, reigns in his place. Deciding that his own wits are too dull for the work, he sends his son as a pupil. The young fellow enters the school dutifully

but reluctantly and contemptuously; he is a healthy-minded, open-air youth, with a taste for chariot-racing that may help to account for his father's financial embarrassment. He emerges a pasty-faced weakling, who is able successfully to confound his father's creditors but (such is poetic justice) has lost all filial respect for the old dodderer himself. The father gratifies his feelings by burning down the Thinkery; but, however satisfying as a gesture, this does not really answer the new challenge to the established sanctities of hearth and city.

Aristophanes, indeed, has no answer to give. Though he hankers after the good old times, he finds matter for mirth in the old as well as the new. Indeed, it was the old that had begotten the new. If an old-fashioned education had not prevented the father from wishing to cheat his creditors, what was the use of preaching honesty to the son, whose teachers proclaimed that right and wrong were whatever he chose to make them? An answer was diligently sought by Aristophanes' favourite laughing-stock, Euripides: the tragedian's passionate sympathy with the victims of injustice may have touched the heart of the scoffers, but it did not answer their argument that 'natural justice' was the rule of the strong over the weak. There was an answer too in the sad wisdom of Thucydides, for those who could follow his reading of the lesson of history. But, after all, the man who tackled the problem most seriously was Socrates himself, who had not altogether been wasting his time up there in the basket. In his youth Socrates had indeed explored the Clouds: he had listened to teachers of the new science and the new morality, but he had a keener mind than any of them, and it brought him back to earth again. And in his descent, as Cicero remarks, 'he brought philosophy down from heaven to earth'.

Plato represents Socrates as speaking thus, in his last hours, of his early conversion from physical science to a new method of enquiry:

'I once heard someone reading out of a book of Anaxagoras, as he said, that it is mind that sets things in order and is the cause of all. This pleased me greatly, and it seemed to me somehow right that mind should be the cause of all. And I thought, if this is so, the ordering mind will order all things and set each in the place where it is best for it to be; so that, if we wish to know the cause of anything, how it comes to be or passes away or exists, it is necessary to find in what way it is best that this should be so. . . . So thinking, I rejoiced that in Anaxagoras I had found a teacher to my own mind. And I supposed that he would tell me first whether the world is flat or round and then proceed to explain the cause and necessity of this, namely that it was better so. And so also with the movements of the heavenly bodies and all other matters. And I would not have parted with my hopes for a great price, so eagerly did I seize the rolls and fall to reading, that I might know as speedily as might be concerning the best and the worse. My hopes were dashed as I read on and saw a man who made no use of mind nor assigned to it any causal action on the ordering of things but alleged as causes airs and ethers and waters and other queer things. He seemed to me like one who should say that Socrates does everything by mind; and should go on to say that the cause why I am sitting here now is that my body is composed of bones and sinews, and the bones are hard and jointed, and the sinews such as to contract and relax, and these by slackening and tightening their pull on the bones have caused my limbs to bend in such a way that I am now here; but should never mention that it seemed better to the Athenians to condemn me to death, and that it therefore seemed better to me to sit here and more just to abide the penalty they appoint for me—for, had I thought otherwise, my bones and sinews would long since have found their way to Megara or Boeotia.' (*Phaedo*, 97-98 [condensed].)

Here we have perhaps as near an approach as any on record to an original idea. For countless generations children had been asking 'How?' and 'Why?'. They had been quieted with traditional answers, based ultimately on more or less fanciful interpretations of stray oddments of the tribe's experience or on its magical or religious ritual. Since the time of Thales certain Greeks had been seeking an answer to the question 'How?' that would satisfy an adult intelligence reflecting on the widening field of human experience as a whole. But hitherto these more active minds had neglected the question 'Why?'. They had approached the study of man from the outside, as a part of *physis* ('How things grow' or 'come to be'). When they came up against human peculiarities that did not seem to belong to *physis*, they had dismissed them with a slighting word. Socrates decided to approach the problem from the other end. To the question *how* he came to be in prison awaiting execution, the physiologists could give an answer of sorts, in terms of bodily mechanism. But he already knew, or thought he knew, *why* he was there: it was because it had 'seemed good' to his fellow citizens to condemn him to death, and it had 'seemed good' to him to accept their decision. It was this that had determined the movements of his bodily mechanism. What, then, had determined the structure of that mechanism, or its very existence? To what, or to whom, had it 'seemed good' to set in motion the starry sphere of the heavens, about which the physicists disputed so glibly? And what was this 'good', anyway? Archelaus, who had been Socrates' teacher, had declared that it did not exist by nature—it was not part of the 'how' of things. Perhaps not. But that was no answer to the question.

To the scientists of the day it must have seemed that 'the good' was a *hypothesis* even more pernicious than 'the hot' and 'the cold', because less verifiable. And there are modern scientists who consider that Socrates led men astray from questions they could answer to a question that was unanswerable. While we have settled the dispute between the Ionian philosophers and their Western rivals as to the shape of the earth, the posers set by Socrates puzzle us to this day as they puzzled his first victims. On the other hand, children still go on asking 'Why?', and the world might have been a pleasanter place today if more adults had asked the same question in the spirit of Socrates.

The change from Socrates the student of nature, caricatured in *The Clouds*, to Socrates the unwearied seeker after 'the good' is most easily understood as something more familiar to us than to his contemporaries—a religious conversion. He was certainly attracted by the mystical beliefs and practices of the Orphic and Pythagorean brotherhoods, which were strange and even suspect at Athens. He fell at times into trances, after the fashion of a *yogi*. And he was prompted by a 'daemonic voice', whose warnings he dared not disregard. In a less 'sophisticated' age he would doubtless have claimed authority as a mouthpiece of God. But 5th-Century Athens demanded some other guarantee of authenticity.

At the outset of his mission he was deeply impressed by the pronouncement of the Delphic oracle that 'no man was wiser than Socrates', which he interpreted to mean that he alone knew that he knew nothing. But this agnosticism was not a conclusion but a starting-point; and it was less negative than it sounds. He recognized that the potter and the carpenter had a knowledge of their art which enabled them to make 'good' pots or chairs and which they could transmit to their apprentices. But he found, precisely as Micius (above, p. 127) was finding at the other end of the world, that the practitioners of 'politics', by which the Greeks meant the regulation of the whole life of a civilized community, had no such knowledge. The most successful of them, such as Pericles, had indeed a certain knack, but they had notoriously failed to transmit it even to their own sons.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Plato's *Gorgias* (515), Socrates asserts that Pericles had made the Athenians 'lazy, cowardly, talkative and greedy'.

They had failed not for lack of such knowledge as the sophists could impart, but because they had no knowledge of 'the good'. At best they may have had 'right opinion'—the true good may have seemed good to them—but they could give no account of this opinion that would convince an unbeliever.

Socrates believed that there was a method, though not an easy one, by which this knowledge could be attained. He called it *dialectic*, the art of discussion. It consisted in pushing a stage further the method by which the sophists had discredited the old morality. Even if 'the good', and other universally intelligible concepts such as beauty and truth, courage and justice, were the products of convention, yet men could not have arrived jointly at these particular conventions if there did not exist some corresponding reality. If this reality could not be apprehended by the senses, then there must be something else in man that was capable of apprehending it. This something was 'the soul' (*psyché*). Hitherto the *psyché* had been conceived only as a shadowy appendage to the body—the 'breath' of life, or a ghostly image visible in dreams and trances. To Socrates it was 'that in us by virtue of which we are called wise or foolish, good or bad', and man was 'a soul using a body'. Knowledge of the good and its subsidiary values was latent in the soul. If a man honestly questioned his own soul, or, better still, if two men alternately played the part of questioner and respondent, setting up *hypotheses* and rejecting them if they failed to square with the data, it was possible by stripping off layer after layer of humbug and misconception and inadequate definition to get down to this reality. To this task he devoted his life, submitting all and sundry to soul-searching interrogatories on the true being of Justice or Courage or Self-control.

It need scarcely be said that Socrates was misunderstood. In face of his uncanny penetration and sly humour, many of the great wits of the day had found their boasted wisdom revealed as a mass of superficial judgements and mutually contradictory assumptions. And few of them were grateful for the revelation. Apart from these individual enemies, the *demos* as a body was suspicious of a man who derided the democratic theory that the ordinary citizen was a competent judge of 'the good'. After the long agony of a siege ending in defeat and a brief spell of oppressive oligarchic rule under the Thirty Tyrants, Athens was in the mood to find scapegoats. Socrates had numbered among his associates Critias, the leader of the Thirty. He was an unaccountable, uncomfortable sort of person, better out of the way. So a respected statesman, a pillar of democratic orthodoxy, brought against him a capital charge of 'introducing religious novelties and corrupting the youth of the city'. Had the accused been anyone else, his bodily mechanism would soon have carried him elsewhere—which was doubtless the result his accusers desired. But, being Socrates, he made a defence which compelled them to choose between his theory of life and theirs. So both parties acted in accordance with what 'seemed good' to them, and Socrates, rejecting all the proffered opportunities of escape, awaited tranquilly the fatal draught of hemlock.

Here again, it is easier for us to understand than for his contemporaries. We are used to martyrdom; to them it was an inexplicable novelty. The profound impression created by this event has made it difficult to do justice to the court that condemned him. Their misunderstanding was not one that could have been cleared up unless the judges had experienced the same 'conversion' as the accused. They were defenders of a traditional morality, which had held society together because no one questioned its authority. Though Socrates himself lived up to the most exacting standards of the old morality, he was on the side of those who sought to undermine it. He wanted to replace it by something new and untried. He was too dangerous to live.

His teaching survives, we cannot say how greatly modified and enlarged, in the dialogues of Plato. Plato (427-347 B.C.) has influenced European (and incidentally

also Islamic and Jewish) thought more intimately and over a wider field than any other thinker, with the possible exception of his pupil Aristotle (385-322 B.C.). Obviously there can be no question here of attempting a summary of 'Platonism' and 'Aristotelianism', even supposing that these -isms ever existed outside school textbooks. In fact, Plato's aim at the outset was not to impart a set doctrine, but to 'open the eye of the soul' in his hearers, though his later writings are more dogmatic in tone. Even Aristotle's thought is not really such a closed system as it appears on the surface. Beginning as an adherent of Plato, he gradually developed divergent views; but the divergence was never as wide as their respective disciples tried to make out. The apparent contrast has been accentuated by an accident. While we possess all Plato's dialogues, written for the general public and aiming at literary effect, we know next to nothing of his formal teaching in the *Academy* at Athens to which he devoted his best years. On the other hand, Aristotle's literary works are lost; the writings that survive under his name are more in the nature of lecture notes prepared for (or possibly by) his pupils. There can be no doubt, however, that Aristotle was temperamentally a more systematic thinker, and his desire for finality and completeness made him more easily satisfied with superficial solutions to his problems.

The difference between the two men is reflected in their posthumous reputations. Aristotle's word was law throughout the Middle Ages, and he inspired the systematic classification of species inaugurated in the 18th Century. Plato was a dominant figure in the age of mysticism that witnessed the Christianizing of the Roman Empire and again in the 16th and 17th Centuries; today he appears to be a more living force than his rival.

Plato's first love was poetry: it is said that in his youth he wrote a tragedy, which he burnt after hearing Socrates speak. His second love was mathematics, with a mystical tinge derived from Pythagoras. But he never quite overcame the fear that the poet in him would betray the philosopher: in his own soul, as in his ideal city, he hesitates between crushing him under a stern censorship and driving him reluctantly into honourable exile.

Aristotle was a good critic of poetry. He was perhaps the first critic to grasp clearly that its function is not merely to portray, nor yet to instruct: he ranks it as 'more philosophic than history' in its power to reveal the universal significance of particular events.<sup>1</sup> But his very tolerance of poetry testifies, what is plain enough from all his writings, that its perilous beauty had no power to shake his prosaic soul. Similarly, for a pupil of the *Academy*, he displays little aptitude or taste for mathematics. Reared in a physician's family, he was by training and inclination a biologist. As an embryologist, in particular, he won the admiration of Darwin, who was destined at long last to shatter the Aristotelian conception of species. And it is in pre-Darwinian biology that we find the best clue to the whole Aristotelian philosophy.

As a mathematician, Plato approached every problem in the light of what is commonly called his Theory of Ideas. The Greek word *idea* (or *eidos*) had not yet acquired the sense of 'notion' or 'mental image'. In common speech it meant 'form' or 'shape'. It was applied by the Pythagoreans to the geometrical 'figures' which they supposed to be the basic components of reality, and by Democritus to his *atoms*. When a scientist wished to say that the secondary qualities are 'natural' (or, as we should say, 'objective'), he said that Nature included 'forms' (*ideai*) of such things as 'the hot' and 'the cold'.<sup>2</sup> Plato's chief object was to defend Socrates' conviction that the values apprehended by the soul are not mere arbitrary conventions. He therefore argues (as perhaps Socrates himself had done) that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Plato (*Laws*, iii, 682): 'For the breed of poets, being divinely inspired, often with the aid of Graces and Muses catches in its songs the truth of events.'

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 222, 226 n.

there is a 'form' or *idea* even of such abstractions as 'the beautiful' and 'the good'. As the teacher's illustrative diagrams are only crude copies of the 'ideal' circle or triangle about which he is demonstrating eternal truths, so a just or courageous action is at best an imperfect imitation of the 'form' of justice or courage. General terms, words that are not the name of anything in particular, can have an intelligible meaning because they are names given to 'forms', which are real objects imperceptible to the senses but visible to 'the eye of the soul'. The 'forms' thus corresponded in the realm of mind to the *atoms* of Democritus in the realm of matter; both were attempts to combine the infinite change and variety of the perceptible world, which had struck Heracleitus, with the continuity and identity without which, as Parmenides had seen, there can be no thought. But Plato, at least in the dialogues, never succeeded in explaining to his own satisfaction what 'forms' exist, or how they are related to the objects of sense perception. Sometimes he speaks of them as *archetypes*—eternal models copied by God in His creation of the world, as they are still copied on a humbler scale by the craftsman who represents in matter the 'form' of a table or a pot. He even toys with the notion that, when the soul recognizes the being of such things as 'equality' that are never perceived on earth, it is recollecting some previous existence in which it had direct vision of the 'forms'. Here Plato is indulging his fancy. But undoubtedly his doctrine of 'forms' is closely linked with his beliefs concerning the nature and destiny of the soul which perceives them and is itself in a sense the 'form' of the body. In his account of the relation between soul and soul, and between the soul and the world of pure 'forms' illumined by the 'form of the good', Plato paved the way for the Christian conception of love. It is only fair to add that neither he nor any other Greek shared the 'Hebraic' attitude to sexual relations which is implied in the commonest modern use of the word 'Platonic'.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle also bases his philosophy on the notion of form (*eidos*). He uses the word, however, more nearly in the sense still retained by its Latin equivalent *species*. For him every particular object is one of a class whose members are distinct pieces of matter but all have the same 'form' or *species*; every *species* is one of a larger class or 'kind' (*genos*; Latin *genus*); and so we proceed upwards in a sort of pyramid. To know a thing is to assign it to its proper place in this classificatory pyramid and draw such inferences about its relations to other things in the pyramid as are warranted by the rules of *logic* (which Aristotle was the first to formulate). The validity of formal logic depends on the possibility of making true generalizations, and this depends on the existence of *genera* and *species* with characteristics common to all their members. We today, who are tempted to deny that the objects of experience fall into such rigidly definable classes, may find ourselves whirled away in the stream of Heracleitus, knowing only that 'all generalizations are false, including this one'. Even in Aristotle's system it is obviously not possible to know anything completely without knowing everything—contemplating the whole interlocking scheme of things in its entirety. This he regarded as the sole occupation of the Deity, and a not impossibly remote goal for the human intellect.

In this orderly intelligible world of matter characterized by form, or forms expressed in matter, there seems to be no room for those phenomena of movement and change which had puzzled every thinker since Parmenides. But it is only at the top of the pyramid that we find in the First Cause, the Divine intelligence, something that simply *is*, self-sufficient and unchanging. Elsewhere Aristotle distinguishes between being 'in act' and 'in power', or (as we still say) 'actually'

<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Platonic love' is presumably suggested by the mystical idealization of sexual love in the *Symposium*, coupled with the teaching of the *Laws*, which seeks to confine sexual relations within the marriage tie while advocating freer social intercourse between the sexes.

and 'potentially'.<sup>1</sup> Change means passing from potential to actual being, or *vice versa*, not out of or into 'not-being'. The intelligible world comprises everything that *is*, whether actually or potentially. To know a thing fully, we must know not only its 'material cause' and its 'formal cause' (*i.e.* the stuff it is made of and the 'form' that stuff has assumed) but also the 'efficient cause' and the 'final cause' (or purpose) which combine to actualize it. In picturing this universe of distinct entities, as definite and diverse as Greek cities, competing purposefully for actuality but never losing their fundamental natures and powers and with no continuous trend in any direction, Aristotle was obviously influenced by the course of events in the Greek world during the preceding century.

The concept of a 'final cause' is most readily applied to biology: no one doubted that a wing exists for the *purpose* of flight until Darwin tried to account for it as a product of purposeless variations that was perpetuated because it happened to enable its possessor to fly. But Aristotle saw evidence of purpose not only in living organisms but throughout the universe, the 'final cause' of everything being 'the good in itself'—that fixed standard of judgement for which Aristotle, no less than Socrates and Plato, was primarily seeking. His system was consequently repudiated by the authors of modern mechanistic theories, which reject the notion of 'final cause'. For the same reason, theologians were able to reconcile Aristotelian metaphysics with Christianity. Aristotle's conception of the soul, however, was much less Christian than Plato's. As he did not believe in 'actual' form independent of matter, so he did not believe in 'actual' soul independent of body. While he thus made matter and body more important and interesting than they seemed to Plato, and so gave a valuable stimulus to most branches of science, he seemed to annul the hope of immortality. Wishing, as always, to harmonize his teaching with the beliefs of the man in the street, he argued that the individual retains enough consciousness after death to be interested in the fate of his children and even his grandchildren, but this semi-consciousness evaporates in time. The only thing that survives is that indestructible creative element in the soul which Aristotle calls the 'active reason'; it survives, however, without memory of the past, for memory belongs to the receptive or passive part of the soul.

With these differences in general outlook, Plato and Aristotle approached the problem of civilization along different lines, but in fundamental agreement. As Classical Greeks, they could conceive the civilized community only as a *polis*, a self-governing city.<sup>2</sup> As metaphysicians, they tended to appraise it by the extent to which it embodied a coherent intelligible 'form', as the Spartan polity, for instance, was an embodiment of military valour.<sup>3</sup> And, because they looked for a changeless *eidos* rather than an ever-growing, ever-imperfect organism, both alike were unprogressive. Between them they summed up the ideals and potentialities of the city-state at a time when, in the actual world, this form of society was already losing its vitality. Their importance for posterity has been all the greater because they stand at the end of a chapter in history, which they are able to survey as a whole.

### *The City according to Plato*

However devoutly we may accept the Platonic doctrine that there must have existed from eternity an ideal 'form' of the civilized community wherein absolute goodness and beauty would be perfectly embodied in human life, we must acknow-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato's suggestion (*Sophist* 247) that the test whether a thing exists is whether it has the 'power' of acting or being acted on.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that they were indifferent to the civilization of 'Barbarian' nations. Plato admired the stability of Egyptian culture and praised the organization of the Persian Empire by Darius; Aristotle speaks highly of the constitution of Carthage (which, however, was also a *polis*).

<sup>3</sup> Plato's totalitarian politics are clearly connected with his leaning towards the 'holism' of Parmenides and the Pythagoreans, as against Ionian individualism.



ledge that not even Plato could portray it as it is, much less translate his vision into practical politics. At best he could 'imitate' it in such raw materials for the statesman's art as lay ready to his hand; and he was fortunate in their abundance and diversity. He himself, though he may have overrated the power of the human soul to apprehend this ideal in theory, was well aware of the gulf between theory and practice. While he let his fancy play at times with a topsy-turvy Golden Age, a fabulous prehistoric Athens or a still more fabulous Atlantis,<sup>1</sup> he did not look for his ideal city in the past. Neither, of course, did he look forward to it as the natural climax of a process of evolution. It existed eternally in the world of 'forms', not just as a pleasing object of contemplation but as a model for the practical politician. For Plato, like Confucius, thought of himself as primarily a teacher of statesmanship eager for an opportunity to apply his own doctrine.

His early political aspirations are described in the autobiographical manifesto known as his *Seventh Epistle* (written in 354 B.C.).

'In my youth, like many young men, I intended, so soon as I should be my own master, to take up a political career. I witnessed the overthrow of the existing constitution, which had many detractors, and the seizure of power by thirty men, some of whom were my kinsmen and acquaintances and were ready to invite my co-operation as in affairs that closely concerned me [404 B.C.]. With the inexperience of youth, I expected to see them reform the city from its wicked ways. When I saw that in fact they so ruled as to make the bygone age pure gold by contrast, so that for instance they tried (without success) to implicate my aged friend Socrates, whom I should scarcely scruple to call the most righteous man of his day, in the arrest of an innocent citizen, I drew back in disgust. Before long this régime collapsed, and bit by bit I was being drawn back into public life. But, though the returned political exiles acted with moderation, there was a vengeful spirit abroad; and certain persons brought against the same Socrates a most unjustifiable charge of impiety, and he was condemned and executed [399 B.C.]. So, as I reflected on contemporary politicians and laws and institutions, so changed from our fathers' times, and on my own helplessness for lack of partisans, seeing everything whirling dizzily this way and that, I resolved to stand aside, but to watch for any opportunity of action. Eventually I decided that all existing cities are governed badly; for their institutions are past all cure except by some combination of design and miraculous chance. And I was forced to say, in praising genuine philosophy, that this alone affords a vision of just practices in cities or individuals, and the nations would not cease from their evil ways till either the genuine philosophers assume political power or the rulers by some divine dispensation become true philosophers.' (324-326 [condensed].)

Plato is here quoting from his most famous dialogue, the *Republic*. This is primarily an enquiry into the nature of Justice as manifested in society and in the individual soul. The argument is illustrated by a sketch of certain features of the ideal commonwealth, but we are given no comprehensive picture of it. We are not even told whether there are any slaves in the *Republic*. The citizens are divided into three classes—a productive class, a warrior class and a ruling class of philosophers, corresponding to three elements or levels in the human soul. In any developing community the productive class appears first.

<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the 'Atlantis Legend' was invented either by Plato himself or (less probably) by Critias or Solon, through whom he professes to have derived it from an Egyptian source (otherwise unverified). The search for external confirmation is like looking for a Lilliput Legend independent of Swift.

'A city [or 'community'—*polis*] comes into being, I fancy, since it happens that each of us is not self-sufficient (*autarkēs*) but in need of many things, such as food, shelter and clothing. The simplest city then would consist of four or five men—a husbandman, a builder, a weaver and (shall we say?) a cobbler. And there will be more abundance of everything more easily produced and of better quality if each of these devotes his time to the special task for which he is fitted by nature, and is free of the other tasks. Moreover, the husbandman will not make his own plough, nor the others the tools of their craft: so we shall need a carpenter and a smith and other such craftsmen. Add to these herdsmen, that the husbandman may have a plough-ox, the builder a team for haulage and the weaver and cobbler wool and leather, and the community will have attained some size. Since it is hardly possible to choose a site where the city can produce everything it needs, there will have to be traders to bring in foreign produce and export other wares in exchange. If the trade be sea-borne, other specialists are called for. And within the city itself there will have to be a market and a coinage for the exchange of goods, and retailers and carriers to devote their time to this exchange.' (*Republic*, ii, 369–371 [condensed from several speeches of Socrates].)

The city is now complete of its kind, and Socrates proceeds to paint an idyllic picture reminiscent of the Taoist Utopia: couched on fragrant herbs, lightly clad and garlanded with flowers, the citizens praise the gods in song and feast off wheaten loaves and barley bannocks, with such wholesome delicacies as peas and beans, figs and myrtle-berries and acorns roasted at the hearth. "And how else," asks another speaker, "would you feed a city of swine?"

This rustic 'city of swine', indeed, though healthy and happy in its childlike innocence, yet falls short of the Platonic ideal. There is a higher good, a nearer approach to the Form of the Good, which cannot be embodied in society or in the individual without fuller experience of life and its temptations. The simple 'city of bare necessities' is not stable. If it prospers, the citizens are likely to develop a taste for luxuries and come to include such supernumeraries as actors, artists, musicians, poets, makers of fancy furniture and women's fal-lals, *pedagogues*, nurses, barbers, pastrycooks and physicians. Along these lines they may sink into the mere money-grubbing of a plutocratic oligarchy, the anarchic self-indulgent individualism which is what Plato understands by 'democracy', or (last and worst degradation) a nerveless subjection to the basest passions personified in the *tyrant*. There is hope of redemption, however, at an early stage of this decline. For, as the city grows wealthy, it will provoke aggression and call for soldiers to defend it; and the disciplined life of the soldier, with its appeal to honour and self-sacrifice, awakens a new element in the soul, which has hitherto lived on the plane of mere desire. By the intervention of a law-giver, such as Lycurgus at Sparta, the state may be modelled and trained on the pattern of this chivalrous ideal. This produces citizens of the type traditionally called 'the best' (the type, for instance, of Pindar's noblemen). But true goodness, the Form of the Good, can be perceived only by yet another part of the soul, the rational or reflective. In the ideal republic a select minority of the warriors (or 'guardians') will be trained to develop this perception by an elaborate education, mainly mathematical—probably a first draft of the curriculum afterwards applied by Plato in the *Academy*. Those who have attained to this vision of the truth are to be dragged down reluctantly from the philosophic heights to govern the city. These philosopher kings, and the guardian class as a whole, are bound by an ascetic rule of life probably derived from the Pythagorean brotherhood and having much in common with Buddhist or Christian monasticism. Not only their meals and other

daily activities, but their goods and even their wives are strictly communal—not so as to give greater licence to the individual, but to subordinate even his sexual life to state control. Incidentally, the women are to receive the same education as the men: if they are mentally inferior (which Plato concedes to public opinion), at least their need of education is none the less. In the more than Spartan austerity of this totalitarian commonwealth there is one brighter touch that reflects the beauty (though not the freedom) of Periclean Athens.

'In painting and other such crafts, in weaving and building and the making of utensils, as in the nature of the body and other growing things, there may be beauty or ugliness. And ugliness, disproportion, discordance, are brethren of foul speech and foul conduct, as their opposites are brethren and likenesses of a good and seemly habit of life. Not only, therefore, must poets be compelled to portray in their poems the likeness of a good character or not to practise their art among us, but other craftsmen also must be forbidden to portray in images or buildings or other products of their craft anything evil or unseemly or mean or ugly. So our guardians will not be reared as in a noisome pasture, browsing on semblances of evil till little by little a great evil take shape in their souls. But we must seek out such craftsmen as have the gift of tracking down the nature of the beautiful and the shapely, that the young, like dwellers on a healthy site, may draw benefit from every quarter whence an influence strikes on eye or ear from works of beauty, as it were a breeze from wholesome regions, guiding them unobtrusively from childhood to likeness and kinship and harmony with the purport of beauty.' (*Republic*, iii, 401.)

It was probably soon after writing the *Republic* (c. 387 B.C.?) that Plato founded in the *Grove of Academus* a scholastic community of Pythagorean type, where for many years he laboured to impart that vision of the truth which cannot be conveyed in writing. Dialectical exercises such as we find in Plato's dialogues were intended as a spiritual discipline, an intellectual *yoga*, preparing the soul for a mystic vision. But this initiation into eternal verities was not an end in itself. As the *bodhisattva* forgoes *nirvāna* and returns to earth as a saviour of others, so it behoves the Platonic philosopher who has struggled out of this cave of shadows to return from the daylight and deliver his fellow men from the thralldom of illusory beliefs and the institutions that spring from them and foster them.

If no philosopher of Plato's making ever became a king, more than one was given the chance to reform society by framing a constitution. And to Plato himself, when he was 60 years old, there came an unexpected opportunity of turning a king into a philosopher. After their defeat of the Athenian expedition of 415 B.C., the Syracusans had (as Plato puts it) 'fallen victims to an unbounded passion for liberty'. A civil war broke out, which threw all Sicily into chaos and gave the watchful Carthaginians a chance to intervene. Hellenic civilization in the West was saved by a Syracusan adventurer, Dionysius, who made himself *tyrant* of his own city and eventually overlord of all the Greeks in Sicily and many of their brethren in Italy. After winning a reputation for breaking all laws, human and divine, he ended his days in peace (368 B.C.), leaving his young son Dionysius II to cope with a Sicily devastated by ambitious despots and unruly mobs, by Carthaginian invaders and the Italian mercenaries hired to expel them. Among the natives civilization had never matured; among the Greek colonists it had run to seed. Plato, on a visit to the court of the elder Dionysius, had found them 'thinking it a duty to be lazy in all else but industrious in guzzling, tippling and debauchery, and jibbing at the very name of any constitution that aimed at justice and *isonomy*' (*Epistle* vii, 326). But in the course of his visit he had made a

convert of one man of sterner mould, the despot's son-in-law Dion. And now Dion was left as guardian of the young ruler and invited Plato to come over and make a philosopher of him.

With slender hope of success, Plato accepted the trust. Whatever dreams he may have cherished of the ideal city, he contemplated in the first instance a practical scheme of re peopling the wasted cities of Sicily from the surplus population of mainland Greece and establishing an orderly constitutional monarchy. But his plans speedily shipwrecked on the character of his pupil. The young prince took a fancy to his tutor but not to his arduous curriculum. Confident of his powers to master the inmost secrets of philosophy with effortless ease, he took his own line in everything. Before long he banished Dion and confiscated his goods. Plato, after suffering detention and (as he believed) danger, got back to Athens. Later, with a perseverance of which he is justifiably proud, he accepted a pressing invitation to return, but his second visit ended as fruitlessly as the first. In 354 Dion pulled off a successful *coup d'état*, but was murdered in the hour of victory. Plato's recalcitrant pupil met the poetic justice his father had escaped. In exile at Corinth he sank into such obscurity that an enquirer after his fate is said to have received the famous answer: 'He's either dead or turned school-master.' The Sicilian Greeks found other leaders, some of them very able. But the chance of planting a vigorous and growing offshoot of Hellenic culture in the West had slipped away. Plato predicted that tyranny and 'democracy' between them would soon blot out the Greek tongue from Sicily and deliver the Island to the Carthaginians and the Oscans. The name Oscan was applied to various peoples of southern Italy, such as the Samnites; Plato may have used it to include the citizens of that rising market town on the Tiber which was soon to be locked in a death grapple with its Samnite neighbours.

After this first-hand experience of civilization in the making and in decay, Plato returned to the theoretical study of its problems. He treats them briefly in the *Statesman* and at some length in the *Laws*. In this his last dialogue a Spartan and a Cretan, representing the two Greek communities reputed to have the best laws, discuss with an Athenian, in whom it is not hard to recognize Plato himself, the constitution of a new city to be founded in Crete on a site long desolate—a procedure not uncommon at that time. The attempt to realize the perfect communal city, such as the sons of gods might inhabit, is now explicitly abandoned in favour of a 'second-best' society based on monogamy and inalienable hereditary small-holdings.

These later dialogues show a juster appreciation of the problems presented by the wayward stubbornness of human nature. The absolute sway of supermen is now relegated to a mythical past, when human communities were ruled with superhuman wisdom by *daemons*. The best that can now be hoped for (though ideally a second-best) is the sovereignty of a wise code of laws applied by law-abiding rulers—the fewer such rulers the better, whereas in a lawless society the concentration of power in a few hands is an evil. Military aristocracy, discredited by the recent decadence of Sparta, now ranks below a more nearly democratic balance between the extremes of despotic authority and anarchic liberty.

Both dialogues contain sketches of the origin of civilization. These are logical analyses rather than historical narratives, but they are based less on pure reason and more on tradition and observation than that in the *Republic*. With keen insight but little regard for accuracy, Plato contrives to extract from history just what he wants. It is curious that, among so many philosophic historians, the Greeks never produced a historically minded philosopher and never made of history (as the Jews or the Chinese did) a vehicle of education.<sup>1</sup> In his observa-

<sup>1</sup> Cf., however, the observation of Polybius (I, 35) that the study of history is the best education for life.

tion of less civilized communities Plato was more excusably deficient. In his day the most primitive peoples known to the Greeks (as also to the Jews and the Chinese)<sup>1</sup> were nomadic herdsmen or villagers engaged in rude husbandry: they had no knowledge of mere food-gatherers till Alexander's troops encountered the Fish-Eaters of the Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup> In the *Statesman* Plato pictures men after the Golden Age left to their own devices and learning by painful experience to order their lives with the aid of god-given arts. In the *Laws* he conjures up an immeasurable vista of human history, punctuated by cataclysms. After Deucalion's Flood only a few ignorant herdsmen had survived on the highest hills, where, like Homer's Cyclopes:

Theirs not to throng to the market square for counsel or judgement;  
Scattered on hilltop heights, deep-lodged in craggy recesses,  
Each gives laws to his wife and sons, unheeding of others.

(*Odyssey*, ix, 112-115.)

These sparse remnants first coalesced into highland clans under their own chieftains. Then the clans merged into hillside settlements, with institutions fixed by law-givers who picked out the best of the diverse tribal customs. When the memory of the Flood had subsided, the settlers moved down and founded cities in the plain, as the Trojans were said to have moved down from Mount Ida. After the Trojan War and the ensuing troubles, the Dorian conquerors of the Peloponnese established kingdoms designed for strength and stability; but the only one to survive was Sparta, in which the various political forces were most harmoniously balanced.

In these developments chance had a large share. It might almost be said that the only real law-giver is chance, acting through such agencies as war, famine and plague. But chance in one aspect is divine providence; in another it is opportunity—something with which the human law-giver, like the pilot, the general or the physician, must learn to co-operate. The best opportunity the law-giver could hope for (unless he were the philosopher king, whom Plato seems to have given up as past praying for) is to find a community whose rulers are willing to initiate reform by reforming themselves. This is almost inconceivable in an oligarchy, unlikely in a democracy, but reasonably possible in a monarchy if there should arise a monarch not only young but 'temperate, quick to learn and slow to forget, brave and chivalrous'—all that the young Dionysius was not. Such a monarch might be able, without transgressing 'the natural rule of law over willing subjects without force', to effect a beneficent revolution.

Supposing he is blest with such an opportunity, the law-giver's aim may be expressed in various ways—for instance, as the formation of a community that is 'free, friendly and wise'. But the target on which, like a good archer, he will ever fix his eye is the highest possible goodness. Of the two kinds of good, the human or bodily goods, which comprise (in descending order) health, beauty, strength and wealth, are dependent on the divine goods or goods of the soul—wisdom, temperance (or self-restraint), justice and courage. Bodily health is useless, and indeed harmful, to the man who is spiritually diseased, as is material wealth to the man who lacks either health or wisdom to enjoy it.

The law-giver, then, will seek to maintain such a standard of living as best subserves man's spiritual needs. The standard of living largely depends on the ratio between territory and population. Plato suggests as ideal a citizen body of 5,040 free heads of families, a number not too large to deliberate as one body and easily divided into equal groups for different purposes. The number must be kept as near as possible constant, for reasons more obvious to a Greek than to a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chuang-tze (9) quoted above, p. 122, last paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these are described as living entirely on fish, which they caught in tidal pools with nets of palm fibre, and dwelling in huts made of fishbones (Arrian: *Indica*, 29).



*British Museum Photograph*

SCENES FROM GREEK COMEDY



ΠΓΑΙ AND ΠΙΓΝΥ

*Harraφ*

modern. A given territory will maintain in robust health only a certain number of persons—chiefly husbandmen, with a few essential craftsmen and traders to make good the local deficiencies. Complete *autarky* seemed to Plato unattainable but not undesirable: he attached little weight to the possible benefits of mutual intercourse between communities or the educational value of travel. If numbers diminish, there will be too few hands for the needful tasks and land will be left waste to tempt invaders. If they increase, there will be too many mouths to fill. This may be remedied by colonization (though the Mediterranean world of Plato's day could offer no great open spaces) or by aggressive war or by commercial development. Plato condemns this last as heartily as war, which he regards indeed as its inevitable outcome. While the Athenians had multiplied apace on industry and the cultivation of a special product (olives) for export, they had grown physically and spiritually less healthy and had become dependent for very existence on foreign connexions which they could maintain only by force. Plato recognizes therefore that any civilized community must sooner or later face the necessity of regulating the size of its population.

The law-giver's main objective, the good of the soul, can be achieved only by education—by training the citizens from childhood to like what the law approves and dislike what it condemns. He must not regard the acquisition of specialized knowledge or skill as a substitute for true education or character-training. For this he must rely more on example than on precept: if the old wish for respect from the young, they must set the example of respecting the young. Education begins with play. Children learn most easily by playing with toy models of the things they will later have to use, and so learning to love them. The teacher must guide their pleasures and pains, their loves and hates, into conformity with 'the principle pronounced right by the law and by the consensus of the oldest and most estimable'. He must not expect from them that rational judgement which is only a rare accompaniment of age.

'Young things cannot keep still in body or voice, but love movement and noise; they are for ever skipping and frisking, as it were dancing and frolicking with joy, and uttering all sorts of cries. The other creatures have no sense of order and disorder in movement—what we call rhythm and harmony. But to us those gods who were given us as partners in dance and song have given a delightful sense of rhythm and harmony, whereby they link us one with another in motion and voice. Shall we not say then that education begins with Apollo and the Muses?' (*Laws*, ii, 653-654.)

In this appreciation of music and its civilizing powers (cf. above, pp. 130, 132), Plato might almost pass for a Confucian, as again in the following passage:

'Next after the Olympians and the gods who keep the city, reverence is due to the Nether Powers, the Daemons and the Heroes [*i.e.* mortals canonized after death]. Next follows the performance of lawful rites in private chapels of ancestral gods; and thereafter due honours to living parents, in payment of the first and greatest of debts—the fullest possible requital of birth and upbringing by the service of property, of body and of soul—that the care and travail expended on the young may be repaid in age when they are most sorely needed, and a lifelong reverence of speech towards parents even when they are wroth, since the heaviest penalty is ordained for light and winged words, and over these is appointed as a watcher Nemesis the messenger of Justice. After their death the fairest funeral of parents is the most moderate, neither surpassing the customary pomp nor falling short of the honours paid by forefathers to their begetters; and the yearly rites in commemoration of the



deceased are entitled to an appropriate share of the means bestowed by fortune on the living. So doing, we should be duly recompensed by the gods and live the most part of our lives in good hopes.

'As to those duties towards our children and kinsfolk, friends and fellow citizens, and towards strangers too for the gods' sake, by whose fulfilment a man should gladden his own life and order it according to law, the train of the laws themselves, ensuring their performance by suasion or (where that fails) by force, will under divine guidance make our city blessed and happy.' (*Laws*, iv, 717-718.)

To supplement education as a means to goodness and harmony, Plato outlined a model criminal code, which naturally drew much from the practice of Athens and other Greek states and in turn had a powerful influence on Hellenistic and Roman law and so on the legal practice of modern Europe. In his old age he had come to believe not only that his guiding principles were true but that it was possible to persuade any rational man of their truth. Every enactment should be prefaced with a preamble designed to convince the citizens of its utility, as the best physicians enlist the co-operation of their patients by explaining the reasons for the treatment prescribed. Against those who refused to see reason, he was very free with the death penalty. He was apparently the first man to advocate punishment for non-conformity in religious beliefs (as distinct from non-participation in the ritual practices deemed essential to the life of the community). Death was to be the punishment for contumacious persistence in atheism; in the worse heresy (later taught by Epicurus) that the gods exist but are indifferent to human welfare; or in the most pernicious belief of all—that the gods are open to bribery and corruption. This intolerance flowed naturally from the faith in absolute values, which Plato, reversing Protagoras, summed up in the formula: 'Not man but God is the measure of all things.'

### *The City according to Aristotle*

Aristotle based his study of civilization on a collection, assembled by himself and his pupils, of 158 specimens illustrating various species of the genus *polis* or 'civilized community'. Much of his work suggests a tidy revision of Plato, pruned of the more extravagant growths of fantasy or genius. His ideal is very like Plato's 'second-best'.

With his usual zeal for reconciling conflicting views, Aristotle argues that the convention (*nomos*) on which civilization rests is itself a part of *physis*. 'Man is *by nature* a civic being' or 'a creature apt for civilization'—that probably expresses his thought better than the stock translation 'a political animal' or 'a social animal'. The true nature of anything can be known by observing it, not in embryo, but only when all its powers are fully actualized, as man's are by civilization. Man's highest good, the happiness for which he longs, is not a state of body or mind, still less a thing that can happen to him: it is a free activity or actualization of all that he is potentially. This conception of happiness as an activity has remained the keynote of European civilization, though Aristotle's own philosophic bent led him to rank 'contemplation' as the highest form of activity. Aristotle's defence of civilization is thus an integral part of his philosophy. It is also a convincing answer to those many critics, before and since, who have objected to civilization as being 'against nature'.

\* 'Since we see that every city [or 'state'] is a kind of community [or 'partnership'], and every community exists for the sake of some good (for all that men do is done for the sake of some supposed good), it is evident

that the sovereign good is the aim of that sovereign and all-embracing community that is called the city. . . .

\* From the two most natural communities [or 'partnerships'], those of male and female and of master and slave, is formed the household . . . The first community of several households for the satisfaction of some need outlasting the day is a village. The most natural village is a settlement of households, of "men suckled with the same milk". That is why cities were formerly ruled by kings; for so were their component units, since every household is under the kingship of the oldest and "Each gives laws to his wife and sons", as Homer says. And that is why all men say that there is kingship among the gods; for, as men liken the forms of the gods to their own, so do they also their lives. The completed community of several villages, which has reached the goal of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) or virtually so, is the city, which came into being for the sake of life but is for the sake of good life. Therefore every city is natural, no less than the first communities of which it is the end; for the nature of a thing (be it horse, man or household) is its final form, what it is when its coming-to-be is completed. The end [or 'final cause'] of anything, that to which it is a means, is the best. And self-sufficiency is the end and the best. Hence it is plain that a city is one of the things that exist by nature, and man by nature is a civic creature, and the man who (by nature, not by chance) is cityless is either worthless or superhuman, like the man denounced by Homer as "clanless, rightless, hearthless". Being without ties, he is a natural breeder of strife, like an isolated piece on the draughtboard.

"That man is a civic creature more truly than bees or gregarious animals is plain. For, as we say, Nature does nothing without a purpose. And man alone of living creatures has rational speech (*logos*). Voice as a sign of pain or pleasure is common to other creatures; for their nature has gone so far that they can feel pleasure and pain and signify them to one another. But rational speech is for signifying benefit and harm, and likewise right and wrong.<sup>1</sup> . . . As man perfected is the best of animals, so when sundered from law and right he is the worst . . . Without virtue he is the most sinful and savage of creatures, the most given to gluttony and debauchery. But righteousness is a civic thing [*politikon*, we might say 'a product of civilization']; for right, which determines righteousness, is the principle of order in a civic [or 'civilized'] community." (*Politics*, i, 1252-1253.)

Aristotle's 'good life' includes two notions which to us seem quite distinct, if not incompatible—virtue and enjoyment; for both in his view would spring naturally from self-fulfilment.

'It is clear that a city is not merely a community of place existing for the prevention of mutual injury and for the sake of exchange (though it cannot exist apart from these), but a community [or 'sharing'] of the good life among households and clans for the sake of complete and self-sufficient life. This is possible only to those who live in the same place and intermarry, whence within cities there come into being those social and religious gatherings and pastimes that come of living together; such is the work of friendship, for the will to live together is friendship. For the purpose of a city is good life, and these things are for the sake of the purpose. A city is a community of clans and villages for the sake of complete and self-sufficient life, that is,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. The remark of Isocrates (*Antidosis* [354 B.C.], 254) that the basis of civilization ('that whereby we have escaped from a brutish life and combined to establish cities, enact laws and invent arts') is *logos*, defined as 'the power to persuade one another and make clear to ourselves whatever we will'.

of life lived happily and finely; the civilized community must be set down therefore as existing for the sake of fine activities and not of living together. Wherefore those who contribute most to such a community have a fuller share in the city than those who are equal or superior in freedom or birth but inferior in civic virtue, or those who surpass in wealth but are surpassed in virtue.' (*Politics*, iii, 1280-1281.)

Aristotle acknowledges that different *species* of constitution may all be good in so far as they actualize their several potentialities as means to this good life. In comparing their merits, he agrees in the main with Plato's later dialogues, but with less leaning towards aristocracy. As a bourgeois from the little city of Stagira, he did not start with the same prejudices as an Athenian land-owner of ancient lineage. He pinned his faith on the sober virtues of the middle class: less tempted than either the pampered rich or the degraded poor to revolt against authority, they have that ability to rule and be ruled in turn which is the cardinal virtue of the citizen. Even the common herd, so long as they are not spoilt by pauperization, have their value in the life of the community, like the roughage in a wholesome mixed diet. Aristotle finds a collective wisdom in mere numbers—in contrast to Plato's scorn of *theatrocracy* ('gallery government'). But the poor are apt to assume that, because all citizens are equal in freedom, they are equal in everything, whereas the rich assume that, because they are unequal in wealth, they are unequal in everything. Either extreme, when in power, is slow to realize that it would be wiser for its own sake to safeguard the interests of the other.

Believing that the potentialities of the human species are limited, Aristotle recognizes that these have been gradually actualized in the past (a much shorter past than Plato envisages):<sup>1</sup> it is useless to rely on the wisdom of our first ancestors, which may have been no greater than our own, if as great. He does not, however, see much room for future progress or much hope of improvement by revolutionary innovations.

'We should look to the experience of long ages in which these suggestions would not have been overlooked if they were sound; for almost all things have been discovered, though they have not all been combined or put into practice.' (*Politics*, ii, 1264a.)

For this reason, among others, Aristotle repudiates Plato's radical reconstitution of society. Plato had supposed that holding wives in common would widen the range of family affection to cover the whole community: in fact it would merely dilute it, like pouring a drop of wine into a bucket of water. Community of goods would abolish the innocent pleasures of ownership, including hospitality and generosity, and lead to general neglect of business from lack of personal interest. It is vain to blame private property for the greed and quarrelsomeness that so often mar human relations: these are inherent in human nature, and experience shows that they are even more prevalent among those who hold property in common. Even supposing that communism could unify the state, it would thereby destroy it; for the whole point of a state is that it is not *one*, but a partnership of different kinds of men who make their several contributions. It is best therefore that men should have their own possessions but should be free to use those of their neighbours at need, as the Spartans when out hunting requisition their fellow citizens' slaves or hounds. The good life is in many ways a communal life, and such institutions as communal meals should be encouraged.

<sup>1</sup> From the extant fragments of Aristotle's early dialogue *On Pleasure and Pain*, it seems that he too believed in periodic cataclysms, through which scraps of ancient wisdom had survived from vanished civilizations.

Many aspects of the individual's life should be regulated by the community, acting through its officials (who, incidentally, should not make a profit out of their office). Aristotle specifies as essential functions of the state the supervision of 'religion, war, revenue and expenditure, town and country, markets and harbours, civil and criminal jurisdiction, auditing of accounts and deliberation on public affairs', with the addition in highly civilized states of 'preservation of the laws, overseeing of women and children, physical training and Dionysiac [dramatic and musical] contests'. The military functions of government are important, but it should never be forgotten that war exists for the sake of peace, as work exists for the sake of leisure.<sup>1</sup> So Aristotle suggests a scheme of town-planning which is a compromise between military security and social amenity. He says nothing in this context of education or the control of population, but like Plato he gives these an important place in the administration of the ideal city. His unfinished chapter on education follows Plato closely and gives no hint of that zeal for the collection of data that distinguished Aristotle's own school (the *Lyceum*) from Plato's *Academy*. He discusses in some detail what is the best population of a city or state.

'The statesman and law-giver, like a weaver or shipwright or other craftsman, must have suitable material to work on. The raw materials of his art are people and land. It is commonly supposed that, in order to be happy, a state must be great. But what is required is not mere size but power to fulfil the functions of a state—greatness in the sense in which Hippocrates was a greater physician than others who surpassed him in stature. A state is not made greater by swelling the number of slaves or resident aliens or those employed in degrading crafts. It is hard, perhaps impossible, for an overpopulous city to observe good laws; for we see that no state with a reputation for good government has a large population. Law is order, and an excessive number cannot observe order, save by the aid of that divine power that holds the universe together.

'In number and size there is a standard of beauty; and there is a right size for states, as there is for plants, animals or tools; if they transcend or fall short by too much, they lose their nature. A ship a few inches or two furlongs in length would not be a ship at all: beyond a certain limit either way it declines in seaworthiness. So a state with too few inhabitants is not self-sufficient; with too many it is self-sufficient in necessities, as a nation, but it is not a state, for its constitution becomes unworkable. What general could command an unwieldy multitude? What herald, unless he had the voice of a Stentor, could transmit his commands? The lower limit to the size of a state is thus the population needed for self-sufficiency; the upper limit is the need for citizens to know each other's characters so as to judge them fairly and choose the fittest for office. . . .

'The territory of a state is limited by the same considerations. . . . It should be such that the inhabitants can live the life of free men, leisurely but not self-indulgent.' (*Politics*, iv, 1326.)

Apart from this limitation of the size of a state (for reasons that have partly lost their validity), the two items in Aristotle's *Politics* that have found least favour in modern times are his defence of slavery and his condemnation of capitalism—the unnatural use of money to breed more money'. Seen in historical perspective, both alike are essential to his championship of civilization as he knew it. Civilization (as Plato had seen) began with the more efficient organization of

<sup>1</sup> Aggressive war against Barbarians is justified, because it is more conformable to nature that they should be subservient to free Hellenes.

labour by specialization. If men had ever asked themselves who was to specialize in the interesting jobs and who in the drudgery, or who was to order whom about, we may well wonder whether they would not have found the problem insoluble. But it is safe to say that no one became aware of the problem till long after it had been solved in practice. In the civilized communities of Aristotle's day the division of labour had been achieved by what Plato called 'the great law-giver'—that 'chance' which is also the will of Heaven and the clever man's opportunity. Some prizes had been well earned; others allotted on the principle of spot prizes at a dance to those who happened to be standing on a lucky spot when their social environment became stabilized. The men who had banded together and pooled their energies 'for the sake of life', for the satisfaction of wants and the assuagement of fears, had learnt to accept the violence and deceit of their fellow men as they accepted the violence and deceit of nature. So there had grown up, unwilled and unforeseen, a rigidly stratified society of which the classic example is Pharaonic Egypt (regarded by Aristotle as the birthplace of class distinctions). In so far as this social pyramid attained stability, each man accepted as a matter of course his own status or standing and the life's work to which it destined him. All, in a sense, were slaves. Even the king was not free, but bound to his throne as the peasant to his plot and no less hedged about with taboos. Such chattel slavery as existed was only an extreme instance of the universal rule of status. It was the emergence in Greek society of the free citizen, bound only by laws of his own making, that first threw slavery into sharp relief and made it seem a thing anomalous and iniquitous. In a Greek city there was still much degrading drudgery to be done, and much of it fell to the slaves. But much of it was in fact performed by free and sovereign citizens. This was made possible by the waning of the rule of status before the rising rule of contract, foreshadowing imperfectly and on a small scale the vast transformation at the end of the Middle Ages when the serf became a hired labourer.

Contract should mean that a man who does a certain amount of work for the community receives an I.O.U. in the shape of current coin which entitles him to have an equal amount of work done for him. In practice we seldom find any such exact ratio between the communal value of an individual's work and the tokens allotted to him. A society held together mainly by the cash nexus is more fluid than one based on status, and the men who rise to the surface in it must be 'good' at something as well as lucky; but 'goodness' at money-making does not necessarily coincide with the kind of goodness whose furtherance is the true purpose of the state. Moreover, owing to the inheritance of wealth, a monetary society may become almost as rigid as one based purely on status. As Aristotle remarks, some men are thought to be superior to others by reason of the wealth, as well as the prowess, of their ancestors.

As Aristotle saw it, slavery could be justified as an institution imposed by nature. In the model community those who were 'slaves by nature' would cheerfully submit to the rule of their natural superiors, who would accept responsibility for their welfare, treat them with kindness and consideration, and themselves be freed from menial toil to lead a more fully human life. Such a society would be stable and harmonious, allowing higher and lower *species* of men to actualize their potentialities. Aristotle is at great pains to answer those who denied any 'natural' distinction between freeman and slave; they seemed to him to be preaching anarchy and the abolition of civilized society, as many of them doubtless were. But he concedes so many human rights to the slave that he allows to the distinction far less practical effect than his own principles would warrant.

Money could scarcely be defended as natural. It was known to be a fairly recent invention, and to a Greek its very name (*nomisma*) proclaimed that it was

'something established by *nomos*'. But Aristotle was willing to accept it as a useful convention when confined to its legitimate purpose as a medium of exchange. It becomes a source of evil when men who are 'concerned only about life, not about good life' mistake it for an end in itself and 'turn all arts into arts of money-making'. It may be said that in Aristotle's day (as again in the Middle Ages when the Church adopted the Aristotelian view of money) there was no 'capitalism' in the modern sense; that Aristotle was objecting not to the financing of business enterprises but to a usury which could end only in the ruin or default of the debtor. Certainly Aristotle could scarcely have foreseen all the credit items on the balance sheet of capitalism; how it would increase production, raise the potential standard of living, stimulate invention and exploration and offer at least a temporary solution for the problem of civilization without slavery (though its immediate effect was to make the slave's lot far harder by turning him into an article of commerce). On the other hand, Aristotle has no very high opinion of 'the city that turns itself into a market for the world', and it is conceivable that, if he *had* foreseen the full effects of capitalism, he would still have thought it incompatible with his conception of 'good life'.

There has been space here to note only a few of Aristotle's contributions to the theory of civilization. He made no such dramatic incursion into practical politics as Plato, but he too tried his hand at turning a king into a philosopher. Plato's pupil had hastened the downfall of Greek civilization in the West. Aristotle's pupil opened to it a vast field for expansion in the East, and in so doing shattered for ever his teacher's ideal of the self-sufficient city-state.

## XIV

### TRYING TO BE GREEKS

#### *The Triumph of Autocracy*

ON the northern boundary of Greece the line between Hellene and Barbarian was less clear-cut than elsewhere. Here were Hellenic peoples, such as the Aetolians, among whom the city-state had never struck root: in their simple tribal institutions, far older than the Homeric Age, they had less affinity with contemporary Greek citizens than with the barbaric Aryan nations of the northern Balkans (Thracians, Illyrians, Kelts). On the fringe of Hellas, and not yet fully accepted as Greeks even in name, lived the Epirotes and the Macedonians. Though these were being progressively Hellenized by contact with Greek colonies on the coast and their rulers claimed descent from legendary Greek heroes, the Greeks still regarded them, as the more civilized Chinese regarded the Ch'in, as warlike savages. Aristotle quotes an ancient Macedonian law that a man who had not yet killed an enemy must wear a halter. Demosthenes, paying an unintentional compliment, declares that the Macedonians are notoriously good for nothing, not even as slaves. They were a sturdy breed of peasants and herdsman, hard livers and hard drinkers, strangers to the Greek virtues of moderation and self-control. As king Philip remarked to a Greek 'Quisling' who complained that he had been referred to as a traitor, they were 'rustic folk, who called a spade a spade'.

From this rude material a line of able rulers had been forging a powerful weapon, but one that only a strong man could wield. In 359 B.C., out of six claimants to the perilous honour, the Macedonian nobles chose as their king the young prince Philip, who had been brought up as a hostage at Thebes. There, it is said, he had studied Pythagorean philosophy and come into close contact with Epaminondas, the greatest statesman and strategist of his age. He retained a genuine zeal for philosophy and Greek culture in general, revealed for instance in

342 B.C., when he invited Aristotle to act as tutor to his son Alexander. But more significant was his creation of a standing army of pikemen and cavalry, which he used with devastating effect first against the undisciplined hordes of his Barbarian neighbours and later against the half-trained militias and fickle mercenaries of the Greek cities. Commanding a more unquestioning allegiance than any Greek *tyrant* or elected magistrate, he also understood the intricacies of Greek politics as no mere Barbarian could have done. With patient diplomacy he played upon the divisions and jealousies of the Greek states and the frailty of their statesmen, proving the truth of his own maxim that 'no city is impregnable that admits the entry of an ass-load of silver'. When he saw his chance, he struck with a sudden ruthlessness that left the slow-moving republics gasping. His achievement is summarized in a speech that Alexander is supposed to have addressed to his troops when they threatened mutiny:

'Philip found you vagrant and destitute, most of you dressed in sheepskins, herding scanty flocks on the hillsides and fighting for them with little avail against Illyrians and Thracians. He gave you cloaks to wear instead of sheepskins, brought you down from the highlands into the lowlands and made you a match for your barbarian neighbours so that you no longer trusted in your native fastnesses more than in your own valour. He turned you into city-dwellers and ordered your lives with sound laws and customs. He made you overlords of those very barbarians who had harried and pillaged you, added most of Thrace to Macedonia and, taking possession of the choicest sites on the coast, he opened up commerce throughout your country and assured the working of your mines. He made you masters of the Thracians of whom you had been scared to death, and opened a broad highway into Greece. The Athenians and Thebans, ever on the alert to attack us, he brought so low that they became dependent on us for their very existence.' (Arrian: *Alexander's Expedition*, vii, 9.)

The Greeks watched the portentous growth of the Macedonian power with mixed feelings. At Athens, Demosthenes in speech after speech urged his countrymen to act before it was too late against this 'blood-polluted Barbarian'.

'If you had done all that you ought to have done and things had still come to this pass, your case would be hopeless. As it is, it is your laziness and negligence that Philip has defeated, not Athens. . . . All men, beginning with you, have given way to him on that very point that has been the cause of every war hitherto in Hellas. You have let him have his own way—given him leave to waylay and rob us one by one and enslave city after city. . . . For never at any time was it allowed to you or the Thebans or the Spartans to have your own way, or anything like it. . . . You have seen how the man's ambition has grown till neither Hellas nor the Barbarian world will contain it. Yet, seeing and hearing all this, we Greeks do not exchange missions or express our indignation. Such trenches of suspicion are dug between our cities that to this day we can do nothing advantageous or right; we cannot get together; we can form no alliance for mutual aid or friendship. But each one of us (so far as I can see) is thinking only how he can profit by the time when his neighbour is being ruined, rather than planning or acting for the safety of Hellas. (*Third Philippic* [341 B.C.], 5, 22-23, 28-29.)

But even at Athens Philip had his 'fifth column'. Some of his partisans had doubtless helped to unburden the silver-laden ass; others were honest advocates

of appeasement. His most eloquent champion was Isocrates, a widely patronized instructor in the niceties of language, a mastery of which he held to be the one infallible hall-mark of a gentleman. A man of words rather than of thoughts or deeds, he yet clung throughout his long life to one practical ideal. In his *Panegyric*, published during the dark days of Spartan supremacy (c. 380 B.C.), he had urged Athens and Sparta to sink their differences and lead all Hellas in a war against the Persian Empire—or rather (182) ‘not a war but a sacred mission’, as we should say ‘a crusade’. With an arsenal of historical and semi-historical allusions he had demonstrated how righteous, how easy and how profitable it would be for the Hellenes. As for the Barbarians, they would be very properly reduced to serfdom. After all, the bulk of them could only gain by a change to Greek overlords, and their whole mode of life was such that no class could develop true virtue. He did, however, hint that some of the lesser breeds might aspire to a nobler destiny.

‘The pupils of Athens have become teachers of others, and she has made the name of ‘Hellenes’ connote not a race but a mental outlook, so that it applies to those who share our [the Athenian?] culture (*paideusis*) rather than a common nature.’ (50).

In the same strain he declared in his *Praise of Euagoras* (373 B.C. Cf. above, p. 219) that some of the native Cypriotes,

‘who used to think most highly of such of their rulers as were most bitterly opposed to the Hellenes, have so far changed that they vie with one another for the reputation of being our friends; they beget children by Greek wives; and they delight in Greek commodities and customs more than in their own. Many experts in music and other branches of culture have chosen to take up their abode in those parts. And many Greeks of good character have gone to live in Cyprus, thinking Euagoras’ kingship more consonant with law and public welfare than the constitutions of their own cities.’

Already Isocrates, finding his appeals to a democratic audience drowned by the yelling of mob orators, was beginning to doubt whether his great enterprise was practicable without an individual leader. He pinned his faith in turn on every outstanding individual in Hellenic politics. At last in 347 he turned to Philip. Other statesmen were bound by the customs and laws of their own self-seeking cities; Philip alone was untrammelled—all Hellas was his fatherland. Let him proclaim himself leader of the Greeks and propagate among their enslaved brethren of Asia that magic word ‘freedom’ which had shattered the empires of Athens and Sparta! Let him outdo the doughtiest exploits of the heroes of old, not forgetting his ancestor Hercules, and incidentally solve the unemployment problem!

‘To what height of fame may you not aspire if you essay to win the whole empire of the Great King, or even to detach an ample portion, say Asia, as some define it, from Cilicia to Sinopé [*i.e.* Asia Minor]! This done, you could plant cities in this area and settle in them those poor wretches who now roam the country in want of daily necessities and assault any who come their way. If we do not stop these vagabonds from banding together by giving them the means of subsistence, we shall find they have grown so numerous that they are more formidable to Greeks than to Barbarians. Yet we never give them a thought, but ignore a mounting menace that threatens us all alike. It is a fit task for a high-souled and far-sighted man, by leading these gangsters against the Barbarian, to relieve them of their troubles and establish them in cities which may stand as our bulwarks. Should you fail in this, at least you will set free the Greek cities planted in Asia. . . .



'If you make this your policy, the Greeks will thank you for blessings conferred; the Macedonians for a rule that is kingly, not tyrannical; and the other peoples for the change from barbaric despotism to the tutelage of Hellas.' (*To Philip*, 120-123, 154.)

Isocrates aimed to inspire Hellas with 'concord' or 'unity of purpose', which he evidently supposed to be attainable apart from political unity. Apparently he was not worried by the thought that the legal and constitutional trammels he denounced were the concrete expressions of the 'freedom' he idolized, or afraid lest Greek culture propagated by an autocrat among Barbarians might lose the very qualities for which he prized it.

Letters and pamphlets in this strain prepared public opinion and whetted Philip's own zeal for a project on which he had already set his heart. But the Greek cities were not to be tempted even by this bait to forgo their independence. When (in 338 B.C.) Philip found a pretext to invade Greece with a large force, Athens and Thebes patched up their quarrel to oppose him. But he defeated their joint armies at Chaeronea. The reign of the independent city-state was over.

### *The Mixing Bowl*

A congress at Corinth, summoned by the new master of Greece, was attended by representatives of all the states except Sparta, which was allowed to stand sullenly aloof. Philip caused himself to be elected leader of a Panhellenic alliance against Persia, and lost no time in putting into effect the dream of Isocrates. But in 336, when an expeditionary force had already crossed into Asia, he was assassinated—probably at the instigation of his wife, the Epirote princess Olympias. Olympias was typical of those spirited and ambitious women, so unlike their sisters of Classical Greece, who were conspicuous in the Macedonian dynasties down to the last Cleopatra. She was probably inured to Philip's infidelities, but she had reason to fear that the latest addition to his harem was a threat to the succession of her son Alexander.

Alexander entered into the inheritance of his father's conquests, completed and projected. He had inherited also Philip's power of making men obey him. To his mother he owed a will that went straight to its objective, overriding every obstacle except at times his own ungovernable temper. His tutor Aristotle deserves some credit for his emulous admiration of the Homeric heroes, the passion for knowledge which led him to organize his army for exploration as well as invasion, and perhaps a reinforcement of his inborn conviction that 'happiness is a form of activity'.

After crushing a Greek revolt, Alexander crossed the Hellespont with a little over 30,000 foot-soldiers and some 5,000 cavalry, perhaps contemplating only the sufficiently ambitious design of mastering 'Asia from Cilicia to Sinopé'. Lured on by experience of the incapacity of Darius III, king of kings, and the fragility of his empire, he led his invincible band through Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and Iran into the heart of Turkestan, then further into India than his Persian predecessors had ever penetrated, and so back through the waterless wastes of Gedrosia (Baluchistan) to his chosen capital of Babylon. Here, at the age of 32, his exhausted and battle-scarred frame succumbed to an attack of fever (323 B.C.).

The Hindu sage, who told Alexander that he owned in fact no inch of land but what he stood on at the moment, is a useful corrective to the historical maps which mark the Danube and the Indus as the bounds of his empire.<sup>1</sup> Within these limits, and indeed much farther afield, while he was alive, there was no

<sup>1</sup> Political maps, designed to show the frontiers of modern centralized states, are apt to be misleading when applied to ancient empires, where the sovereign's authority faded out by degrees from direct personal rule to occasional exaction of a token tribute.

body of troops that could break the phalanx of his pikemen or withstand the charge of his cavaliers. He could rely on the rank and file of his Macedonians to obey his direct commands up to a point. But they were pining for their wives and families and their bleak upland farms, and more than once it took all his tact and charm to avert a mutiny. When they jibbed at a further advance into India, he had to give way. He could reckon almost as confidently on the loyalty of his generals, though on occasion his confidence was betrayed; but to those whom he left as satraps to administer provinces many months' journey away he had to allow a discretionary power which they did not always use as he would have wished. His Greek mercenaries had no quarrel with a commander who won and distributed such fabulous treasures; but he was their paymaster, not their king. The citizen levies supplied by the League cities might feel a similar personal allegiance to their brilliant leader, but to many of their stay-at-home fellow-citizens he must have seemed an alarmingly successful ally. Some former tributaries of the Great King had sectional reasons for welcoming his conqueror. The merchant princes of Sidon, for instance, helped him to destroy their rival Tyre, though in so doing they actually diverted the commercial sovereignty of the eastern Mediterranean to the Egyptian Alexandria. In Egypt too he benefited by the prevailing hostility to Persia. But the Asiatics as a whole, in so far as they were conscious of any change, accepted it without enthusiasm, while the more warlike tribes, especially in Iran itself, remained covertly or openly rebellious.

Alexander might have attempted to maintain his authority over this patchwork of peoples as captain of a predatory band, holding down unwilling multitudes by force through garrisons posted at strategic points, and filling up gaps in the ranks with recruits from Macedonia or Greece. This seems to have been what many of his followers expected. They were correspondingly disgruntled when he adopted a very different plan. He aimed to step into the shoes of his Persian predecessors, and to unify his empire by assimilating his European and Asiatic subjects. He proceeded to enlist regiments of Barbarians, especially Persians, and to equip and train them in Macedonian fashion. He took over the existing administrative and tax-collecting organization together with the officials who knew how to work it. He even appointed Persian as well as Macedonian satraps, though few Persians succeeded in holding high office for long. At the same time he initiated reforms which weakened the satraps and strengthened the central government.

To regularize his position in the eyes of his Oriental subjects (besides, it may be, gratifying a personal weakness), he offended Greek and Macedonian sentiment by adopting the costume of the Persian king and the etiquette of his court, including prostration on the part of all who approached the royal presence. In Egypt, he followed the Persian example of assuming the titles and divine honours of the Pharaoh. By proclaiming himself a god, the son not of Philip but of Zeus, he gained a legal suzerainty over the Greek cities without infringing their democratic constitutions, which it was his policy to foster. In ceasing to rank as a mere man, he had raised himself not only above legal restrictions but above national or racial limitations. This was not a mere piece of ridiculous vanity (though Alexander was undoubtedly vain) but a well-tried political device which had its origins in the prehistoric dawn of kingship and was successfully imitated by many of his successors and later by the Roman emperors. It did not shock devout and simple souls, who found him a worthier object of worship than many in their pantheon. To the more philosophically inclined it squared with the fashionable theory that all gods had originated as deified human beings. \*

\*Alexander's most durable work was the leavening of the Barbarian mass of Asia with new Greek cities (at least 25, traditionally 70). They extended from

Alexandria in Syria (now called Alexandretta or Iskanderun) to Alexandria the Farthest (Chodjend in Turkestan), Alexandria of the Arians (Herat in Afghanistan) and Alexandria under Caucasus (*i.e.* the 'Indian Caucasus' or Hindu Kush) in the Cabul valley. These served as permanent garrisons and (in accordance with Isocrates' scheme) as outlets for the surplus population of Greece. The remote easterly foundations soon lost their Hellenic character, but many of the others proved powerful magnets. The Alexandria laid out with magnificent engineering and architectural skill at the western mouth of the Nile soon became the largest Greek city in the world. Alexander's example was extensively followed by his successors, and the steady flow of emigrants to these new foundations was no doubt one reason why the population of Greece began about this time to decline.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the earlier Greek colonies, these settlements were often far removed from the sea and from that direct contact with the Hellenic world which the sea made possible. Instead of self-contained city-states on the fringe of a barbarous and mainly hostile continent, these were vital cells in a vast body politic. The loss of freedom was compensated by the protection and favour of their overlord. We know little of their political institutions, but the evidence suggests that the citizens enjoyed various degrees of local autonomy and that laws based on Greek practice were applied to all residents within the city walls and the appurtenant territory, whether they were Greeks or not. In such an environment, where Hellene and Barbarian intermingled more thoroughly and on more equal terms than had hitherto been possible, the distinction between them, which had appeared fundamental to Plato and Aristotle, was seen to depend on culture rather than on nature.

Alexander himself strove to promote this intermingling by every means, especially the speedy and effective one of intermarriage. By marrying a Persian princess he set an example which he encouraged all ranks of his followers to imitate. But this act, and everything that could be construed as favouritism towards Barbarians or aping of their autocratic institutions, weakened Alexander's popularity among his European soldiery. Not long before his death, when the army was at Opis on the Tigris (afterwards refounded as Seleucia by his general Seleucus), he was faced with open mutiny. By skilful diplomacy he contrived to stage a dramatic reconciliation.

'Thereupon Alexander sacrificed to his customary gods and held a public banquet. The Macedonians were seated beside him, next to them the Persians and then the other nations most distinguished in reputation or merit. He himself and those round him drank out of the same mixing bowl and poured the same libations, the Greek seers and the Mages officiating. Chief among the blessings for which he prayed was *concord* and fellowship between Macedonians and Persians. The story tells that those who partook of the banquet numbered 9,000 and that all these offered the same libation and accompanied it with a song of triumph.'<sup>2</sup>

Isocrates' prayer for concord among Hellenes had been generally approved in theory, if not in practice. Alexander's prayer for concord between Hellene and Barbarian seemed to many contemporary Greeks to cast a slur upon their racial and cultural superiority. The echoes of the resulting controversy continued to reverberate for three or four centuries.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Polybius, xxxvi, 17: 'In our times [mid 2nd Century B.C.] all Hellas has been assailed by childlessness and general scarcity of population . . . , although we have not been afflicted either by continuous wars or by outbreaks of pestilence.' Of course other factors, economic and psychological, were involved.

<sup>2</sup> Arrian: *Alexander's Expedition*, vii, 11. The 'story' is presumably Arrian's usual source, the authoritative *History* written by Alexander's general Ptolemy, afterwards king of Egypt.

'Eratosthenes censures those who divide mankind into two classes, Greek and Barbarian, and those who advised Alexander to treat the Greeks as friends and the Barbarians as foes. He argues that it would be better to classify on the basis of goodness and badness; for even of the Greeks there are many bad, and of the Barbarians many thoroughly refined<sup>1</sup>, such as the Indians and Iranians (*Areianoi*), not to speak of the Romans and Carthaginians with their admirable constitutions. That was why Alexander disregarded his advisers and took over as many as possible of the [foreign] dignitaries and conferred benefits upon them.

'Eratosthenes does not see that this classification into blameworthy and praiseworthy was actually based on nothing but this: that one class was in fact governed by the rule of law and civic institutions and familiarity with culture (*paideia*) and letters (*logoi*), the other not so. Therefore Alexander did not disregard his advisers, but acted in full accord with their advice, paying heed to its real meaning.' (Strabo [c. A.D. 20]: *Geography*, i, 4.)

Eratosthenes (3rd Century B.C.) was doubtless right in supposing that in Alexander's day the distinction between Greek and Barbarian was still conceived largely as a matter of race. In the ensuing centuries it became so obvious that the distinction was purely cultural that Strabo could not believe that the racial theory had ever been entertained. To a still later writer it seemed that this momentous change in outlook was the work of Alexander himself.

'A philosopher is to be judged not only by his writings but by his utterances, his actions and his pupils. The pupils of Plato and Socrates were apt by nature and Greeks by speech. Yet there was many a Critias and Alcibiades among them, who shook off their doctrine like a bridle and turned to other courses. If you look for Alexander's pupils, he taught Hyrcanians to wed, Arachosians to till the soil, Sogdians to cherish their parents instead of murdering them, Persians to revere their mothers instead of mating with them. O miraculous philosophy, whereby Indians worship Greek gods and Scythians bury their dead in lieu of eating them! We marvel at the power of Carneades, who could convert the Carthaginian Hasdrubal into the Greek Cleitomachus, or of Zeno who persuaded Diogenes the Babylonian to turn philosopher. But, when Alexander had tamed Asia, Homer became familiar reading there, and the children of Persians and Susians and Gedrosians recited the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles. Socrates, for introducing new forms of worship, paid the penalty to Athenian prosecutors; but, thanks to Alexander, Bactra and the Caucasus bow down to the gods of the Hellenes. Plato wrote one *Republic*, but has persuaded no one to face its rigours in practice; Alexander planted over 70 cities among barbarous tribes and by scattering Greek ideals broadcast over Asia subdued a savage and brutish way of life. Few of us read Plato's *Laws*; but Alexander's laws are still current among tens of thousands. Those whom he conquered are more blest than those who escaped him. But for him, Egypt would never have had an Alexandria, nor Mesopotamia a Seleucia nor the [Indian] Caucasus a city of Greek settlers, whereby savagery has been quenched and worse customs changed to better. Therefore, if philosophers most justly pride themselves on refining and harmonizing rough and uncultured characters, Alexander should be accounted the greatest of philosophers.

'The much admired *Commonwealth* of Zeno, founder of the Stoic sect,

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word (*astēios*) means 'urban' or 'urbane', i.e. it connotes the qualities of the city-dweller, as distinct from the 'rural' in the political sense. In this passage both writers are feeling for some word to express the concept 'civilization' without having an exact equivalent available. Cf. below, p. 314.

amounts in sum to this: that we should not live in cities and parishes, with our private sets of rights and wrongs, but should esteem all men fellow citizens and parishioners, and there should be one life and one *cosmos*, as of a single herd grazing on a common law.<sup>1</sup> This was sketched by Zeno as a dream or fantasy of the law-abiding philosophic commonwealth; but Alexander turned the dream into fact. For he did not, as Aristotle advised him, deal with the Greeks as a leader and with the Barbarians as a master, caring for the former as friends and kinsmen but using the latter as animals or plants, and so mar his leadership with bloody rebellion and festering discontent. As one sent by God to be a common ruler and reconciler of all, using force of arms only where reason failed him, mixing in one loving-cup ingredients from every source, lives and characters, marriages and everyday customs, he bade all men look upon the habitable world as their fatherland, the armed camp as their stronghold and their sanctuary, the good as their kinsfolk, the wicked as foreigners, the contrast of Hellene and Barbarian as something not to be recognized by cloak and shield as against scimitar and caftan but only by the difference between virtue and vice.

'Demaratus of Corinth, an old friend and guest of Philip, shed joyful tears at the sight of Alexander in Susa, and exclaimed that those Greeks had missed a great joy who had died too soon to see Alexander seated on the throne of Darius. For my part, I do not envy the men who saw that sight—a turn of fortune such as often befalls kings. What I should right gladly have witnessed is that solemn espousal when Alexander gathered in one gold-roofed pavilion round a common hearth and board 100 Persian brides and 100 bridegrooms of Macedon and Greece, and himself in festal garland was first to raise the hymeneal lay, the love-charm that linked in fellowship the mightiest and most puissant of races, bridegroom of one bride but guardian and father and ruler of all. Gladly would I have cried: "O barbarous and dull-witted Xerxes, how vainly you laboured to bridge the Hellespont! Behold! This is how wise men link Asia to Europe, not with planks and pontoons, with soulless and unsympathetic fetters, but with lawful love and virtuous wedlock and partnership in the care of children." . . .

'If the power (*daemon*) that sent Alexander's soul to this world had not speedily recalled it, one law would have watched over all mankind and all would have lived by one right as universal as the light of day.' (Plutarch (?): *On the Luck or Merit of Alexander*, 228-230.)

Plutarch is hard put to it to prove that all Alexander's words and deeds conformed to this lofty philosophic standard. But it remains true that his empire was the most promising nucleus the world has ever seen of a world-wide state—that *Cosmopolis* of which the Stoics were soon to dream. The gulf between East and West was wider than the Hellespont, and it needed a greater than Alexander to bridge it. Yet, if he had lived to turn his genius into the paths of peace and had left a successor to take up his work as he had taken up his father's, who can say what miracle might not have been accomplished? As it was, he left a babe in the womb, an idiot half-brother and a number of extremely able and ambitious generals. And *Cosmopolis* faded into a philosopher's dream.

### *The New Order*

Alexander's death in 323 was followed next year by the death of his teacher Aristotle and his hereditary foe Demosthenes, who died by his own hand after

<sup>1</sup> There is a pun here on *nómos* (law) and *nomós* (pasture), both words being derived from the verb *nemo* (allot). Cf. the suggestion of G. Thomson (*Aeschylus and Athens* [1941], p. 54) that *nómos* originally meant the body of customary rights governing the use of common pasture.

the failure of a despairing effort to free Athens from Macedonian suzerainty. Those three deaths are symbolic. No man of action since has so magnificently monopolized the limelight of history. No thinker has summed up the mind of his age in a form that seemed so adequate and so final. No voice has championed with such vehement conviction the claims of a political liberty that was fast fading from the earth. Within the walls of the city-state the Greeks had done their bit and said their say. Now the city walls were crumbling; and Greek history in the centuries that follow wears an air of anticlimax.

By modern writers the interval between Alexander's death and the submission of the Greek world to the rule of Rome is called the Hellenistic Age—the age of Barbarians who *Hellenized* or 'tried to be Greek'—generally with the implication that its culture was an inferior imitation of the real thing. This disparagement began very early. The ancient schoolmasters, who preserved and multiplied copies of the 5th and 4th Century 'classics' as models for their pupils, rejected the literature of the ensuing centuries as too slangy and popular for their high purpose. In consequence, while we know the names of over 1,000 Hellenistic writers, some of them amazingly prolific, only a handful are much more than names to us. Apart from inscriptions and papyri and a substantial remnant of the *World History* of Polybius (which covered the period 221–146), we owe our knowledge of the age almost wholly to late compilers, who drew uncritically on prejudiced or propagandist sources.

Through this 'literary smoke-screen'<sup>1</sup> we can see that the Hellenes and Hellenizers of the last three centuries B.C. made some headway in tackling a harder problem than any their forbears had faced. Within the city-state, life had been unnaturally simplified. The citizen had found his interests and duties clearly defined by the local *nomos*, which included fashion, law, morality, religion—a whole philosophy of life. Even if he protested against it, the *nomos* itself had given his protest a determinate form—an *eidōs*. As the city decayed, the individual found himself in a formless world, where there was nothing to check his wayward impulses except a vague sense of obligation to mankind at large or to some superhuman purpose conceived as directing human destiny. It was no easy task, under the guidance of ideals still so indefinite, to transform the civilization of Classical Greece, essentially a local and transitory growth, into something potentially universal and enduring. In a wide sense all subsequent European civilization has been not Hellenic but Hellenistic. If we are tempted to rank the makers of Hellenistic civilization (in the narrower sense) as fumbling jerry-builders—if we find their institutions ramshackle, their moods inconstant, their beliefs illogical, their ideals unfocused—we shall have the less hesitation in admitting that there are no people in recorded history with whom we can more wholeheartedly sympathize.

Let us take a bird's-eye view of the Hellenized world in the relatively stable shape it assumed after 301 B.C., when the main issue between Alexander's would-be successors was settled at the battle of Ipsus. Our first impression may be that the unity imposed on the Middle East by the Achaemenid kings had been broken, and that political frontiers once more corresponded to the cultural and geographical frontiers which had been a determining force before the rise of Cyrus—as they still are in the main today. A closer view will show that, after all, the political frontiers of the Hellenistic Age were of minor importance: they remained the boundaries of dynasties, not of nations.

#### (a) Egypt

The Nile valley was again the seat of a powerful kingdom. Native priest-hoods, functioning as *clergy*, kept alive the traditional forms of religious literature

<sup>1</sup> W. W. Tarn: *Hellenistic Civilization*, p. 6.

and art, even after they had begun to write their secular records in Greek. Native judges administered the ancient laws for their own people. The peasantry had changed next to nothing of their immemorial usages. For Ptolemy I had applied to Egypt the policy that his late sovereign had rejected. In his brand-new capital (which was distinguished from its namesakes as 'Alexandria *by* Egypt', not '*in* Egypt') and elsewhere up and down the country he had planted colonies of immigrant merchants and soldiers, Greeks or Macedonians or more or less Hellenized Asiatics (including many Jews), who were directly dependent on him for their profits or their pay. They were kept clearly apart from the natives by various privileges and by enactments (valid in some districts at least) prohibiting inter-marriage. They had their own cult of the deified Alexander, lying embalmed in state at Alexandria, to whom were added successive kings and queens of the Ptolemaic dynasty after their deaths. There was also an organized Greek worship of Isis and Serapis (a Hellenized version of Osiris), which differed fundamentally from the native ritual. The newcomers were to be an army of occupation, living *by* Egypt and not *in* it.

The wealth of Egypt made it fairly easy to attract immigrants.<sup>1</sup> But it was no less important to keep in touch with the source of supply. This was doubtless the main reason why the Ptolemies struggled to maintain a foothold on the coasts and islands of the Aegean, at the cost of unprofitable foreign entanglements. These entailed the upkeep of a powerful fleet, which helps to explain why the Ptolemies (like the Pharaohs before them) held fast to Palestine with the well-timbered slopes of Lebanon.

The alien garrison was largely parasitic, supported by taxes which the king squeezed from the native peasants and artisans. The Egyptians had been accustomed for thousands of years to heavy taxation, and a complex fiscal organization already existed. Ptolemy II brought it to perfection. Under his successors, officials and inspectors and counter-inspectors became so numerous and costly that the whole system threatened to defeat itself.

The surviving literature affords us several glimpses of the glitter and gaiety of the metropolis. The author of a treatise on Alexandria<sup>2</sup> describes with oppressive detail a procession arranged by Ptolemy II in honour of *Dionysus*, which defiled through its spacious high streets 'from the morning star till the evening star'. Its innumerable features included gorgeous tableaux symbolizing scenes in the life of the god; trains of chariots drawn by exotic animals and driven by little boys dressed as charioteers, beside whom stood little girls in golden robes armed with miniature shields and lances; '400 cartloads of silver vessels, 20 of gold vessels and 800 of spices'; and, bringing up the rear, '57,600 infantry and 23,200 cavalry in full-dress uniforms'. This royal act of worship quite throws into the shade the modest tribute rendered to the god by the public-spirited citizens who produced the Athenian drama. The same author, in describing the royal barges of Ptolemy IV, one of them rowed by 4,000 oarsmen, strikes the keynote of all this magnificence with the incidental remark that the ivory figures forming a frieze round one of the state cabins were 'indifferent in artistry but astonishing in costliness'.

Now finds of Egyptian and Greek papyri, scrappy and often puzzling even when perfectly preserved, are gradually giving us some insight into the life of the countryside. Against a background of Nile flood and harvest and the chaffering of the market-place, we see men and women taking refuge from extortionate and corrupt officialdom, and the financial and domestic worries of all ages, in the comforts of religion and magic. A lentil-seller complains that he cannot pay his quota because his rivals the pumpkin-roasters 'sit down beside the lentils and

<sup>1</sup> In Theocritus' *Idyll* xiv a rejected lover is advised to mend his broken heart by seeking his fortune under Ptolemy II, 'the best of paymasters'.

<sup>2</sup> Callixenus of Rhodes (in Athenaeus v, 27).

## HELLENISTIC PORTRAIT COINS



(a) Alexander the Great



(b) Antimachus I of Bactria



(c) Cleomenes III



(d) Nabis



(e) Antiochus I



(f) Antiochus IV



(g) Antony



(h) Cleopatra





TICURUS



*Beth Shimon I. Holo 1971*

CHASTIPUS

roast their pumpkins' and so cut him out of his trade. A younger brother writing to an older, who pins his faith to omens and dreams, grumbles not unreasonably:

'You and your gods are liars. They've got us fairly stuck in the mud, and when you have a vision that we're going to be saved then we're completely sunk.' (A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar: *Select Papyri*, No. 100 [c. 150 B.C.].)

More than once we hear mutterings of more serious trouble—agrarian unrest, riots and strikes, outbreaks of the still unquenched nationalism of the native Egyptians. Meanwhile, as the following document illustrates, the fusion between natives and settlers continued, despite all efforts to check it.

'In the 44th year [of Ptolemy VII; 126 B.C.] on the 9th Paūni at Pathyris before Asclepiades the overseer of the market, Dryton son of Pamphilus, a Cretan, of the honourable order of the Successors, captain of cavalry on the reserve list, has made this will. May I live to be master of my own in good health. But, if I suffer the lot of mortals, I bequeath and give my possessions in land, goods and cattle and anything I may acquire in addition as follows: my war-horse and all my weapons to Esthladas my son by my former wife Sarapias daughter of Esthladas, citizeness [of some Greek city in Egypt?], according to the laws and to the will made through the record office at Little Diospolis in the 6th year of [Ptolemy VI] Philometor [175 B.C.]. . . . To him also I give four of the domestic slaves [literally 'bodies']. The other two slave-women, Irene and Ampelion, I give to Apollonia and her four sisters, my daughters by my present wife Apollonia *alias* Semmonthis [evidently an Egyptian woman who had also been given the Greek name Apollonia]; likewise the vineyard site in the province (*nome*) of Pathyris, and the wells of baked clay in the same, and the other appurtenances, and the cart with its harness, and the dove-cote, and the other half-finished one. . . . And they shall own the two slaves and the cow in equal shares for their households according to the apportionment I have made. . . . Of the remaining buildings and sites . . . and my other possessions, including bills payable in corn or cash, Esthladas shall have half and Apollonia and her sisters the other half; and they shall provide money jointly for finishing the dove-cote. And to my wife Apollonia, if she continues to live blamelessly at home, they shall give every month, for the maintenance of herself and her daughters, 2½ measures of wheat and ¼ of croton and 200 copper drachmae. And they shall give to my second daughter Aphrodisia *alias* Tachratis [an Egyptian name] for a dowry 12 copper talents out of the common funds. Whatever property Semmonthis may have manifestly acquired for herself while living with Dryton, she shall continue to own.' (*Ibid.* No. 83 [condensed].)

Times had changed since Homer's tale of another Cretan adventurer, 1,000 years before, who had also sought his fortune in Egypt at the point of the sword.

### (b) Asia

Almost all Alexander's Asiatic conquests were comprised in the kingdom founded by Seleucus I. But this unwieldy bulk soon shrank to more manageable dimensions. The easternmost provinces were incorporated in the Indian empire of Chandragupta Maurya. The Greek settlements in the Afghan area were cut off from the Hellenic world by the rise of a powerful Iranian kingdom under a native dynasty from Parthia. In Asia Minor Attalus, governor of Pergamum, established a prosperous kingdom roughly corresponding to the ancient Lydia. Only in Mesopotamia and Syria did the house of Seleucus maintain undisputed

authority, as heirs to the bygone glories of Babylon and Assyria. On a cuneiform tablet recording his rebuilding of a temple at Babylon, Antiochus I, son of Seleucus, bears the traditional titles 'mighty king, king of the world, king of Babylon, king of the lands,' etc. Seleucus himself asserted, as overriding all differences of national custom, 'the universal law that what a king ordains is always right'.<sup>1</sup> But in fact his dynasty lacked the assured position of its rivals the Ptolemies and had to make bigger concessions to its subjects. Seleucus, unlike most of Alexander's marshals, had remained faithful to his Persian wife. Through her, his sons were lineal descendants of the Achaemenid kings. They had thus a certain claim on the loyalty of their Asiatic subjects and a more tolerant attitude than the Ptolemies towards mixed marriages. Their subjects were racially more akin to the Greeks than were the Egyptians, and culturally better prepared for Hellenism. The civic institutions inherited from the Sumerians provided a groundwork on which could be erected a semblance of the Greek *polis*. To Tyre and Sidon it was found possible to grant the status of semi-autonomous 'cities'. In some districts there was undeveloped country available in which Greek or Macedonian peasants could be settled without dispossessing the native tenants or reducing them to serfdom, as had generally been necessary in Egypt.

The Seleucid kings had thus opportunity and motive for continuing the Hellenizing policy of Alexander, though they acted at first more cautiously and with more reliance on the European element in the population. They peppered their kingdom with 'colonies' in which the adaptable children of Shem were trained in Greek schools and gymnasia, bargained and preached and philosophized in the generalized 'Common Dialect' of the Greek language, offered sacrifice in Greek temples and attended 'councils' and 'assemblies' on the Greek pattern to discuss their municipal affairs and register eloquent compliance with the royal 'requests'.

Our meagre records give no coherent picture of the stages and methods by which Hellenization proceeded or the resistance it encountered. Outside the cities, the Achaemenid system of feudal lordships and temple estates persisted. Antioch in Syria, which soon replaced Seleucia as the Seleucid capital, vied in gaiety with Alexandria. The frivolous hangers-on of the court and the shiftless and riotous proletariat shared the same superstitions and the same taste for effortless amusement. Antiochus IV, who enjoyed the society of either, used to slip out with a few boon companions, Arabian Nights fashion, and might be found talking shop with the goldsmiths and other fashionable artists, hobnobbing with tourists in inns or gate-crashing embarrassingly on the revels of his humbler subjects. To many Orientals, Greek culture meant what French culture has meant to many foreigners in modern times. They saw that the Greek was free from many of the arbitrary rules and taboos that bound them; they failed to perceive the restraints imposed by the Greek conceptions of the dignity of man and the obligations of citizenship. A Syrian Greek writes thus of his countrymen.

'The inhabitants of the cities, relieved of anxiety about their daily needs by the fruitfulness of the country, indulged in frequent gatherings, in which they were for ever making merry. They used the gymnasia as baths, anointing themselves with precious oil and unguents, and the "schools" (for so they called their banqueting halls) as hostels, spending most of their time there in swilling wine and guzzling dinners, to the loud-twanging strains of a lyre, so that the entire cities resounded with such jangling.' (Posidonius, in Athenaeus, xii, 35.)

A good deal of this Hellenism was obviously quite superficial. The country-folk, and the poorer classes generally, were relatively little affected by it. But

<sup>1</sup> Appian: *Syrian War*, 6x.

its appeal to the richer class may be gauged by the headway it had made even in the stony ground of Judaea, before the intemperate zeal of Antiochus IV provoked a reaction. The Aramaic speech of Palestine became so packed with Greek terms, descriptive of imported commodities and notions, that when a Rabbi indulged in one of the routine *polemics* against all things Greek, he probably called it by the Greek word *polemos*.<sup>1</sup> Josephus tells us how the rival claimants to the office of Chief Priest, Jesus<sup>2</sup> and Onias, assumed the Greek names of Jason and Menelaus, and the latter's partisans expressed the wish to 'forsake the laws of their fathers and the civilization (*politeia*) based on them and to follow the king's laws and adopt Greek civilization', as a symbol of which they asked leave to build a gymnasium in Jerusalem. The Samaritans of Northern Israel, in proof of their desire to 'live according to Greek customs', even volunteered to change Jehovah's temple on Mount Gerizim into a temple of 'Zeus Hellenios'. And, when the Judaizing party won the day, the patriotic pamphlet that signalized their triumph, the *First Book of Maccabees*, was actually published in Greek. Two centuries later the same Common Tongue was used to record the life and teachings (uttered apparently in Aramaic) even of so lowly a person as the Chief Priest's namesake, the carpenter's son of Nazareth.

### (c) Europe

In the Macedonian homeland, after years of civil war, a new dynasty was firmly established by Antigonius II (276-239 B.C.). While the Antigonids could not vie with their Eastern rivals in wealth or territory, they had at their back a loyal and united nation of fine fighting quality. They were not driven to cast round for new systems of government, because they could rule only on traditional lines, respecting ancient liberties. But they had two thorny problems of their own—their relations to the northern barbarians and to the free cities of Greece.

In 279 B.C. Celtic or Galatian (*i.e.* Gaulish) tribes invaded the Balkan Peninsula and established themselves in the heart of Asia Minor. This was only an episode in a movement that began in central Europe about 400 B.C.—one of those mass movements of the northern peoples that have played (and are still playing) such a decisive part in Mediterranean history. It accomplished less than most of these migrations, before and since, because it encountered in Italy the legions of Republican Rome and in the Balkans the Macedonian phalanx.

In Greece the Antigonid kings sought to hold the supremacy won by Philip, partly by maintaining Macedonian garrisons at key points such as the citadel of Corinth, partly by favouring particular cities or parties in opposition to the counter-blandishments of their rivals, especially the Ptolemies. Even when the Macedonian grasp weakened, it was strong enough to warp the healthy functioning of the city-states. These remained, however, far less subservient than the new cities founded in the Eastern kingdoms. Athens, with her freedom circumscribed and her imperial ambitions exhausted, retained her cultural primacy. The command of the Aegean sea had passed to the mercantile republic of Rhodes, the last Greek community to find vital realization in the institutions of the city-state. At Sparta two gifted rulers, attempting to breathe new life into the moribund laws of 'Lycurgus', initiated an interesting social experiment. Plutarch has recorded the idealistic dreams of the young king Agis IV (244-241 B.C.) and their frustration by the intrigues of his self-seeking supporters.

'The rot had set in soon after the Spartans, having broken up the Athenian Empire, had glutted themselves with gold and silver. So long as

<sup>1</sup> Talmudic writings contain over 3,000 words of Greek or Latin origin, including such significant examples as *politikos* ('citizen') and *ochlos* ('rabble'). An early borrowing was the familiar *sanhedrin* (from the Greek *synedrion*).

<sup>2</sup> A Greek spelling of the Hebrew *Jeshua* (or *Joshua*).

the number of households had remained as fixed by Lycurgus and the several patrimonies descended from father to son, the continuing order and equality had saved the city from other transgressions. But when, on the motion of an *Ephor* who had quarrelled with his son, they had legalized the alienation of patrimonies, those who were able began to acquire new possessions at the expense of the rightful heirs; wealth was accumulated in a few hands, and poverty beset the city, bringing in its train an ignoble spirit with envy and hostility towards the possessors. There were left no more than 700 full citizens (*Spartiates*), and of these only about 100 owned the land; the disinherited and disfranchised masses lost all heart for defence against foreign foes, but were ever on the watch for a chance to revolt.

'Therefore Agis, rightly thinking it would be a fine achievement to restore equality to the citizens and fill up their ranks, began to sound public opinion. The young rallied to his call and girt themselves for noble deeds, donning in freedom's name a new habit of life. But the older men, in whom the rot had sunk too deep, dreaded to be dragged back to Lycurgus like a runaway slave to his master. . . .

'The king's mother, who had influence by reason of her numerous dependants and friends and debtors, was at first shocked at his projects and tried to discourage him. But he urged that he could never compete with other kings in wealth (for the servants of satraps of Ptolemy and Seleucus were richer than all the kings of Sparta put together); yet by establishing equality and community among the citizens he might so far surpass his rivals' luxury by self-restraint and magnanimity that he would win the name and fame of a truly great king. By this appeal to the spirit of honour he won her support and her influence over the rest of the women, who were always a force in Sparta . . .

'Having procured the election of his friend Lysander as *Ephor*, he had a bill brought before the Elders abolishing debts and apportioning the land nearest the city into 4,500 lots, whose holders (including picked outsiders) were to rank as citizens and live according to the old Spartan discipline, and the outlying lands into 15,000 lots to be given to Dwellers-Round-About who were capable of bearing arms. As the Elders were not of one mind, Lysander summoned the Assembly, and he and Agis and their supporters appealed to the citizens to restore equality according to the law of Lycurgus, setting the example by putting their own possessions into the common fund.' (*Life of Agis*.)

At first the reformers carried all before them. Their chief opponents, led by Leonidas, the king of the other reigning house, were driven into exile. Debtors' bonds were burnt in the market-place with a blaze which Agis' uncle Agesilaus hailed as 'the brightest light and the most cleansing flame he had ever seen'. Agesilaus was himself heavily in debt; but he was also a big land-owner, and he contrived to delay the equalization of lots till a chance presented itself, during Agis' absence on a campaign, of recalling Leonidas and wrecking the whole scheme. Agis himself on his return was condemned by the Elders and executed. His young widow was forcibly married to Leonidas' son, who shortly afterwards succeeded him as Cleomenes III.

It was apparently the influence of his wife, coupled with the teaching of his tutor, the Stoic philosopher Sphaerus, that induced Cleomenes to embrace the cause to which his rival had forfeited his life. By exploiting a military success and his popularity with the troops, he overthrew the constitution and used his despotic power to complete the work that Agis had begun. The austere militarism of 'Lycurgus' was a corpse that defied resurrection, and the Stoic commonwealth

an unsubstantial dream; but the extension of citizen rights to favoured outsiders was a promising development (whose value was even then being strikingly demonstrated in the growth of the Roman Republic), while the cancellation of debts and the redistribution of land were the main planks in a programme that was being urged in almost every city of Greece. In the interdependent Hellenic world of the 3rd Century it was no longer possible, as it had been (up to a point) for a 6th-Century *tyrant*, to recast the social structure of one city without violent repercussions elsewhere. The influx of precious metals from the East after Alexander's conquests had upset the economic balance in Greece, and the expansion of industry and commerce had widened the gulf between rich and poor. The rich generally upheld the puppet governments backed by Macedonian arms (though later, when Rome eclipsed Macedon as the champion of privilege, they transferred their favours). The impoverished masses were ready to welcome a deliverer in Cleomenes. In thus incurring the hostility of Macedonia, Cleomenes earned the valuable financial aid of Macedonia's enemy Egypt. But he also came up against a new force in the Greek world—the impulse to federation.

Philip's forceful enrolment of the Greek cities in the Corinthian League had brought the dream of Isocrates into practical politics. If the Greeks had been united under the Macedonian king, could they not unite against him? This policy was initiated by two backward sections of the Greek population, the Aetolians and the Achaians, who had never developed fully sovereign cities but retained relics of an ancient tribal organization to form the basis of a federal system. The Achaian League is painted in rosy colours by Polybius.

'Those who tried in time past to unite the Peloponnesians met with no success, because they strove not for general freedom but for personal aggrandizement. In our own days such headway has been made that they not only pursue a common policy as allies and friends but have adopted the same laws, standards, measures and currency, the same executive, deliberative and judicial authorities, and in short well-nigh the whole Peloponnese scarcely differs from a single city save in the absence of a single encircling wall. How was this result achieved, and that not by any such great or celebrated nation as the Spartans or the Arcadians, but by the Achaians? It is no good saying "by chance". For nothing, whether conformable or contrary to expectation, is accomplished without a cause. The cause, in my opinion, lies here. There is not to be found anywhere a system and principle more compact of free and equal speech, in a word of democracy, than that prevailing among the Achaians. This attracted some of the Peloponnesians as voluntary adherents, won over many by persuasion and argument and speedily reconciled those who had been brought in by a timely use of force. Extending to new entrants the same rights as to original members, it was sped to its goal by two strong helpers, fairness and friendliness. . . .

'These political principles had long been established among the twelve cities of the Achaians before a statesman appeared who had at once the genius and the opportunity to realize their power of promoting the liberty and *concord* of the Peloponnesians.' (ii, 37-42 [condensed].)

Whatever germ of it may have existed before the Macedonian conquest, the real history of the league (or 'commune') of the Achaians begins about 280 B.C., when four of their cities combined to expel Macedonian garrisons and puppet tyrannies and organize a close alliance with common political machinery—a representative *synod* (reinforced by an occasional referendum) to a general Assembly of citizens), a 'common secretary' and two elected generals (later reduced to one). The League grew apace, especially after 251, when the non-Achaian city of Sicyon was

brought in by Aratus, leader of a faction that had expelled the Macedonians. Thenceforward, since the League constitution forbade immediate re-election, Aratus was regularly elected general in alternate years. By diplomacy and battle he pushed on the work of liberation. In 243 he expelled the Macedonian garrison from the citadel of Corinth and enrolled that city in the League. The only remaining obstacle to Peloponnesian unity was the stubborn isolationism of Sparta, which under Cleomenes changed to aggressive imperialism. Against Macedonian tyranny the bourgeois statesmen of the League had appealed successfully to the Greek love of political freedom and equality; but they found themselves outbidden by Cleomenes' promise of social revolution. The Arcadian Cercidas, an ardent upholder of the League, was moved to address a quaintly worded appeal to his own class on behalf of the sick and needy.

What obstacle, prithee, obstructs him  
Who is free as his fancy conducts him,  
Being God, to accomplish his will,  
That he strips not the swindler usurious,  
The fire-eater filibustrious,  
The gorger regurgitaturious,  
Of the wallow of wealth where they swill,  
To give to the grugged-crust-cruncher,  
The dip-in-the-public-bowl luncher,  
A drop from the cup that they spill?

Is the vision of Justice so bleary,  
Or the one orb of Phaethon weary?  
Has darkness delusive and dreary  
Enshrouded the brightness of Right?  
Are they gods who behold not and hear not?  
Nay, the pans of the balance should veer not  
In the stedfast Olympian's sight. . .

Why is Zeus, universal begetter,  
To some a stepfather? Far better  
To leave to the learned wit-whetter  
To treat these high themes—he may know.  
The goddess be ours of requitals,  
Nemesis, and those others whose titles  
Are All-Heal and Freely-Bestow.

Aratus himself, seeing his life's work crumbling, invoked other powers to his aid. Perceiving, as Polybius puts it, that Cleomenes had turned the Spartan monarchy into a tyranny, and dreading the outcome of his vigorous policy,

'he made up his mind and set about executing his purpose secretly; for he was obliged to say and do outwardly many things in flat contradiction to it, and there were some of his actions which he does not even mention in his *Memoirs*.' (ii, 47.)

Plutarch expresses himself more bluntly.

'Aratus resorted to a deed disgraceful to any Greek but especially unworthy of his own past achievements and statesmanship, and brought back into the Peloponnese those very Macedonians whom as a mere stripling he had expelled. . . . Shunning the barley bannock and the skin cloak and (the direst charge he brings against Cleomenes) the levelling of wealth and the uplifting of poverty, he prostrated himself, and Achaia with him, before the diadem and purple and Macedonian and satrapic firmans.' (*Life of Cleomenes*.)

In 219 B.C. the Macedonians and Achaeans restored a more normal régime in Sparta; Cleomenes, an exile in Egypt, met his death in a vain attempt to induce the Alexandrians to revolt in defence of their liberties—in which they were quite uninterested.

Federalism was the last creation of the Greek political genius, and in some ways the most promising. It was the logical development of that principle of free association on which the *polis* was founded. Given a century longer in which to overcome its own inherent weaknesses, the Macedonian monarchy, the intransigent civic patriotism of such states as Sparta and the mutual hostility of the Achaean and Aetolian federations, it might have established a better working compromise between the claims of order and freedom than any yet achieved. But a storm was blowing up from the West against which the young growth had not strength to stand.

In the West, as Plato had foreseen, the Greeks were losing ground before the Carthaginians and Italians, especially as the latter came more and more under the unifying sway of Rome. A last attempt to stem the Barbarian tide was made by the brilliant adventurer Pyrrhus, who had made himself king of Macedonia's western neighbour Epirus. In 280 B.C., at the invitation of the Greek colonists of Tarentum, he invaded Italy at the head of 25,000 men, with fair hopes of succeeding in an enterprise more momentous even than the career of the great Macedonian half a century before. He twice defeated the Roman legions, untutored as yet in the finer points of Greek military science. But his 'Pyrrhic' victories got him nowhere, and a spectacular campaign in Sicily was just as fruitless. In 275 he left the island to be 'a battleground for Rome and Carthage'. This battle was still raging in 211, when Syracuse, the last Greek stronghold in the West, surrendered to the Romans. Six years earlier the Greeks of the homeland, deeply embroiled in the squabbles that followed the expulsion of Cleomenes, had so far wakened to their peril that a general conference was called at Naupactus under the presidency of Philip V of Macedonia. Here Agelaus of Naupactus repeated with a new insistence that appeal for unity which runs through the whole course of Greek history.

'If it is too much to hope that the Greeks should forgo their quarrels and ask no greater boon than salvation won by their joint efforts, speaking with one voice and linking arms like men fording a torrent, at least let us make common cause against the immediate peril from the West. For who can doubt that, whether the Carthaginians or the Romans are victorious, their ambitions will not stop short at the boundaries of Italy and Sicily? To you above all, king Philip, if instead of harassing the Greeks and weakening their powers of resistance you would treat them rather as limbs of your own body, the present crisis opens a prospect not only of safety but of universal empire. Otherwise you may soon find that the choice of peace or war no longer rests with you. If we go on playing our old game of wars and truces till these stormclouds looming from the West have broken over Greece, we shall find ourselves praying that the power might be restored to us of settling our own disputes among ourselves.' (Polybius v, 104 [condensed].)

This may pass as the last utterance of free Greek statesmanship, eloquent, clear-sighted and ineffective. Before we look more closely at the storm brewing in the West, it remains to glance at the new vision of life that the Greeks were trying to bring into focus in these last years of their political freedom.

### *Citizens of the World*

To the Barbarian what was new about Hellenistic civilization was precisely the Hellenic element—the body of customs and beliefs that had grown up in the



city-states of the Aegean seaboard. To the Hellene the closer contact with alien cultures was only one of the new influences that were upsetting his habits of life and thought. Assuredly the new converts to Hellenism introduced certain novelties into the Greek world. They accepted monarchical rule more submissively, even reverently. They were habituated to more intense religious emotion and more unreasoning superstition. They brought fresh technical knowledge to the practice of various arts and crafts, besides some theoretical knowledge, especially astronomical data—though this new light was disastrously blent with astrological moonshine.<sup>1</sup> But probably Hellenism was even more profoundly modified by an internal development, political and economic, which may be summed up as the decay of the city and the rise of the town.

The typical figure of Classical Greek civilization, which had shaped him as he had shaped it, was the citizen farmer. In his double capacity he had found varied and stimulating employment for body and mind, a balanced standard of values, independence and self-respect. This type appears as slightly old-fashioned even in the Athens of Aristophanes. In the 4th and 3rd Centuries it gave place to a type that got less from the community and gave less in return. When the citizen no longer felt himself free to mould his own destiny by open discussion and intelligent voting, he lost interest in politics. If he was a man of peace, he grew less willing to sacrifice his leisure and his life at the city's call. If he was adventurously inclined, he could win richer rewards by selling his services to 'the best of paymasters'. In the rising Oriental capitals, or even in thriving towns of older Hellas such as Ephesus and Corinth, there were openings that promised new comforts and excitements. The more enterprising left the countryside. As early as 300 B.C., we find the townsman laughing at the country bumpkin, who 'is not impressed by the sights of the town, but when he sees a bullock or a donkey or a goat will stand stock-still and stare at it'. Among the struggling fortune-seekers of the towns there grew up a type that measured success partly in wealth and partly in various petty and unmeaning distinctions—a type immortalized by Theophrastus.

'The Self-important Man changes his cloaks while they are still serviceable and anoints himself with perfume. In the market-place he loiters round the bankers' tables; in the gymnasia he is always to be found where the young men are training; in the theatre, when there is a show on, he occupies a seat near the generals. As likely as not he keeps a pet monkey, buys Thurian oil-flasks, nice and round, Spartan walking-sticks, nice and twisty, and tapestry with figures of Persians. He has a little private court for wrestling and ball-games, and goes round lending it to philosophers and sophists and fencers and musicians for their performances. During a performance he himself arrives late, so that one of the audience may point him out as the owner of the place. When he has sacrificed an ox, he nails up the scalp at his front door, entwined with enormous wreaths, so that any who enter may see that he has sacrificed an ox. When he has been in a procession with the knights, he hands the rest of his outfit to a slave to take home, puts on his cloak and parades up and down the market-place wearing his spurs . . . When his lapdog dies, he commemorates it with a tombstone and epitaph . . . He contrives that he shall be designated by the Presidents of the City Council to announce to the people the solemnization of public sacrifice; wearing a spotless cloak and a garland he steps forth and proclaims: "Men of Athens, we the Presidents have made to the Mother of the Gods sacrifice meet and acceptable. Receive ye her blessings!" Then he goes home and tells his wife that this has been the proudest day of his life.' (*Characters*, 21. Cf. 4.)

<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that Hellenistic astronomers were indebted to the Babylonian Kidānas (6th Century B.C.).

In this social atmosphere men were more easily degraded by poverty, more easily bored by wealth, from which they might even react into asceticism. Up-rooted from the familiar scenes and set ways of the countryside, the plain man readily lapsed into that scepticism which had formerly been confined to a handful of highbrows. Where the few had anchored their drifting faith to the dictates of reason, as interpreted by Sophists or Socratics, the many shrank from this intellectual effort and sought solace in novel forms of magic and religion or in some more popular and dogmatic philosophy. The complete unbeliever put his trust in the typical deity of the Hellenistic Age—the fickle goddess Fortune.

With the spread of popular education, which in many cities was provided by the civic authorities, there was growing up a large reading public of this disorientated semi-cultured class—men (and, in increasing numbers, women) whose quest was not so much for truth and beauty as for guidance and amusement. Books were provided for them as cheaply as was ever possible before the invention of printing, and they set the standard for the bulk of Hellenistic literature.

On the other hand, the age begot an equally new breed of cloistered scholars, who scorned to 'draw their utterance from the common fount'. These competed for the enervating sunshine of royal patronage. The Ptolemies expended some of their colossal income on a library at Alexandria, which ultimately boasted 700,000 volumes, and a Temple of the Muses (*Museum*) served by learned acolytes. Their example was followed by the rival monarchies, and even at Athens the *Academy* and the *Lyceum* developed on a more modest scale into sanctuaries of pure scholarship, acquired and imparted through the uncritical medium of the written word. Almost all the philosophic sects joined in praising Socrates. But the pampered inmates of 'the bird-coop of the Muses' could have little in common with the blunt-spoken citizen who served his country at need as a soldier or a magistrate; who (reputedly) earned his living as a stonemason; who read little and wrote nothing; who derived his ideas direct from his experience of life and formulated them in conversation with keen-witted hecklers.

Since thinkers and workers were out of touch with each other, neither faced straightforwardly the task of mental readjustment which the unsettled age demanded. Both alike, to use a typical word of the 20th Century, were 'escapists'. As sophisticated townsmen with no intention of ever going back to the land, they took a sentimental delight in Theocritus' idylls of the artless loves of shepherds and shepherdesses amid the hills and dales of Sicily where

overhead  
Many an elm and poplar swayed;  
From a grot, the Nymphs' abode,  
Hard by the holy water flowed  
Murmuring; in shady thickets  
Tireless chirped the tawny crickets;  
Far away the tree-frog's croak  
From many a thorny tangle spoke;  
To lark and linnet's cheerful tone  
Turtle dove made answering moan;  
Brown bees buzzed about the spring;  
Summer scented everything.

(vii, 135-142)

When they tried to picture a more satisfying form of society than their own, it was no longer a purified city-state set on the rocky soil of Hellas, but a rainbow-tinted fairyland at the world's end. Such were the Islands of the Sun, 'discovered' by Iambulus after four months' sail from Ethiopia, rich in natural products that would have staggered the Swiss Family Robinson and inhabited by men very different from those of 'our world'.

'They live to the ripe age of 150, for the most part without sickness; those who exceed this term or are maimed or deformed are compelled by law to terminate their existence, which they do by lying down on a certain herb that induces first sleep and then painless death . . . They are organized in clans and groups of not more than 400 members. Each group is under the leadership of its oldest member; when he reaches the prescribed term and puts an end to himself, the next in age succeeds . . . They do not take to themselves wives, but possess them in common, loving all equally. Those who suckle the babies frequently change them round, so that even the mothers do not know their own. So they live without jealousy and strife, setting the highest value on *concord* . . . Despite the abundance of natural resources, they live very simply and temperately. Up to a certain age they are employed in rotation on domestic service, fishing, the various crafts and other useful work. They are devoted to all forms of culture, especially *astrology* [possibly still in the older sense of 'astronomy'] . . . Their festivals are accompanied by recitals and singing of hymns and eulogies in honour of the gods, above all the Sun, after whom they name the Islands and themselves . . . Besides the Sun they worship as gods the All-embracing [Ether] and the heavenly bodies in general.' (Diodorus, ii, 56-60.)

This Utopia had been anticipated by the 'Panchaia' of Euhemerus (c. 300 B.C.), also in the Indian Ocean, where travellers had found confirmation of the author's theory ('Euhemerism') that the myths of the gods were perversions of true histories of heroic men and women. It is possible that both writers were drawing on travellers' tales of Ceylon.

This same 'escapist' mood is expressed by Hellenistic authors in many ways: in striving for exciting novelties or delving among quaint antiquities; in a taste for romantic adventure or in a painstaking but superficial realism.<sup>1</sup> Like the Hellenistic sculptors, who expressed such a wide range of moods with such high technical skill and reached a new level of faithful portraiture, they could do anything except recapture the serene self-confident perfection of the Classical masterpieces. Unable to idealize reality because they had no clear-cut ideals, they lacked courage to face it as it was. The beginnings of that spiritual crisis which Prof. Gilbert Murray has called 'the failure of nerve' can be seen already in the restless experimental mood of the 3rd Century almost as plainly as in the listless inertia that set in under Roman rule.

The change from Hellenic to Hellenistic is most manifest in the drama, which evidently reflects the taste of a large section of the people. Classical Tragedy had presented traditional scenes from the legendary past, enacted by masked figures whose language was as formal and archaic as their costume; but it had not shrunk from the most heart-searching and mind-probing problems of human character and destiny. The Old Comedy, ranging lightheartedly from Cloud Cuckoo Land to a burlesque and boisterous Hades, had provided a fearless and penetrating commentary on current issues, political, moral and intellectual. From the union of these two sprang the New Comedy, whose master was the Athenian Menander. "Life and Menander," exclaimed one enthusiast, "which of you copied which?" Thanks to some lucky finds of papyri, we now know that Menander's characters were indeed drawn from life and spoke naturally and colloquially (though still in verse), while his ingenious plots kept within the bare bounds of possibility. But he did not transcend those limitations that have continued to cramp his imitators from the Roman comedians down to many favourites of the modern stage and screen. His world is peopled with a handful of stock characters—Heavy Father,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herodas: *Mime* iv, in which a party of sight-seers being shown round an art gallery judge every work entirely by its likeness to the thing portrayed.

Scapegrace Son, Cowardly Swashbuckler, Hard-headed but Soft-hearted Prostitute—whom he manœuvres through a handful of stock situations till the time comes for deftly untying the quite unnecessary knot. The audiences who enjoyed these scenes were evidently not interested in serious clashes of character or ideas. They were quick-witted, kindly and tolerant, willing enough to applaud fine-sounding sentiments but suspicious of any attempt to provoke reflexion.

The same air of easy-going detachment from serious problems marks the character sketches attributed to Theophrastus, which we have already sampled. These reveal also a habit of exact observation well suited to the collection, if not the interpretation, of scientific data. And we find in fact that Theophrastus, as Aristotle's successor at the *Lyceum*, carried on one side of his Master's work by classifying and cataloguing plants, stones and smells as diligently as he did his fellow men. It is typical of the age that he recognized in Nature an exuberance and irregularity which could not be perfectly fitted into the strait-waistcoat of the Aristotelian system.

'In classifying plants we must not distinguish too sharply between classes, but we must draw distinctions that hold good of the type [*typos*—a vaguer word than 'species']. The distinction between wild and cultivated plants seems to depend simply on whether or not they have been cared for. That between fruitful and fruitless, flowering and flowerless, or even between evergreen and deciduous, depends on locality and climate: they say that at Elephantinê [in southern Egypt] even vines and figs do not shed their leaves. Yet such distinctions must be drawn. . . . Along with these we must consider differences in environment. Indeed these in themselves would seem to afford a basis of classification, *e.g.* between plants that like moisture of one kind or another and those that prefer a dry habitat . . . Here again we cannot distinguish too sharply, as some plants are indifferent and amphibious (*e.g.* tamarisk, willow, alder) and even admitted dry-land growths are sometimes maritime (*e.g.* palm, squill, asphodel). But to look at such exceptional instances, and in general to look at things in this way, is to look amiss. For Nature herself does not behave in this way, and is not bound in these matters by any absolute rule.' (*Study of Plants*, i, 3 [condensed].)

While the Aristotelian school continued thus for some generations to exercise their critical faculty as well as to accumulate facts, they had already embarked on the course that led at length to such undigested agglomerations of fact and fable as Pliny's *Natural History*.

A vast new field of exploration had opened to the Greek intellect. Geographically, the eastern horizon had been immensely widened by the reports of Alexander's companions and later travellers such as Megasthenes—some of them very competent observers. In western waters Pytheas of Marseilles, soon after Alexander's death, penetrated to the fountainhead of the amber trade on the shores of the Baltic and of the tin trade in the 'Pretannic Isles'. He was not only a merchant adventurer but a scientific explorer with enough knowledge of astronomy to take observations of latitude—Hellenistic science did not provide the means for accurate determination of longitude. His data were used by Eratosthenes, sometime head of the *Museum* at Alexandria, in constructing a map of the world based on lines of latitude and longitude. Eratosthenes also succeeded, by sound geometry and a little luck, in computing the size of the earth with an error of only a few miles. Another remarkable achievement of Hellenistic astronomy was the theory of Aristarchus that the earth moves round the sun. This was left an open question by Hipparchus, the ablest of the ancient astronomers, and rejected by Claudius Ptolemy (2nd Century A.D.), who summed up the work of his predecessors. The

complex 'Ptolemaic Theory', which was universally accepted for the next 14 centuries, explained the observed planetary movements almost equally well.

In general, while the practical geographers were suspicious of scientific methods, the astronomers were indifferent to the practical application of their studies. They approached their subject in a mystical spirit,<sup>1</sup> tinged with the prevailing 'escapism', which is well illustrated by a poem attributed to Ptolemy:

I know that I am born to die  
And few are my allotted days;  
But, when I trace the tangled maze  
Of stars that circle through the sky,  
Then am I lifted up on high  
And tread no more the earthly ways;  
Among the gods my spirit strays  
And tastes of immortality. (*Greek Anthology*, ix, 577.)

The practical application of astronomy that appealed to the multitude was its use in astrological predictions, whose credibility rested on this mystical conception of the science.<sup>2</sup> Nothing better illustrates the inability of the normal human being to handle knowledge without relating it to his own immediate needs. Where there is no obvious logical connexion between knowledge and utility, the gap is popularly filled by wishful thinking.

In other fields of Hellenistic science we find the same gap between theory and practice. The mathematician who worked out the rudiments of optics never entered into fruitful collaboration with the despised illiterate glass-blower. The ingenious dilettante (probably Ctesibius) who amused a cultured circle at Alexandria by making a ball rotate under the pressure of steam did not find his invention seized upon by an enterprising manufacturer eager to cut down his wage sheet—slave labour was cheap, and there was no cut-throat competition among industrialists. Archimedes was by choice a pure mathematician: he reckoned as his greatest achievement the determination of the relative volumes of the sphere and the cylinder. It was only under pressure from a practical-minded patron (Hiero II of Syracuse) that he worked out the principles of the lever and pulley for use in shipbuilding and of hydrostatics for testing the purity of metal. When the Romans attacked Syracuse, he rose to the occasion with some mechanical devices that baffled the besiegers for three years. On the surrender of the city (211 B.C.) he returned to his geometry: the Roman soldiers had been ordered to spare the life of the great inventor, but when one of them found an old dotard drawing lines in the sand he felt quite at liberty to club him on the head. In this soldier H. G. Wells, rather unkindly, finds 'the true figure to represent the Roman attitude to science'. Whether we blame the Roman conquerors or, more justly, the whole structure and growth of ancient society, it is indisputable that for at least 14 centuries after the death of Archimedes natural science in Europe made virtually no progress. Indeed it would be hard to point to any original idea in any field of human thought that decisively influenced European civilization during this period—with, of course, the one notable exception of Christianity.

### *The Philosophies of Weakness<sup>3</sup>*

Archimedes is typical of the more specialized and sporadic studies that claimed the attention of the 3rd Century. But the Hellenic desire to 'see life steadily and see it whole' was by no means dead.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the passage quoted below (p. 293) from Cicero. Cicero translated into Latin verse the *Phaenomena* of Aratus of Soli—a very popular piece of semi-mystical astronomy.

<sup>2</sup> Astrology in Mesopotamia had been confined primarily with the fortune of the state; the Greeks applied it to the fortunes of individuals.

<sup>3</sup> It is substantially true of all Hellenistic philosophy that its starting-point is 'the individual's sense of his own weakness and helplessness' (Epictetus: *Discourses*, II, 11), whereas for earlier Greek philosophy it was primarily 'the sense of wonder' (Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, I, 982 b).

For the closely reasoned Platonic and Aristotelian systems, linked as they were with the dying ideals of the city-state and a small intellectual aristocracy, there was no place in the Hellenistic world. The Aristotelians indeed, baffled by the task of systematizing the rising heaps of newly observed facts, were themselves losing faith in logic. They were given a lead by Theophrastus, who shocked traditional philosophers by assigning a dominant role in human affairs to fortune. The Platonic school committed intellectual suicide more thoroughly: Arcesilaus (who retired from the headship of the *Academy* in 240 B.C.) found the beginning and the end of wisdom in the assertion of Socrates that he knew that he knew nothing, though the form of the assertion appeared to Arcesilaus unwarrantably dogmatic. The negative and destructive side of Socrates' dialectic thus became the main feature of the *Academy's* teaching during this middle period of its long history. It was carried still further by an organized school of Sceptics, whose leading figure Carneades, abandoning certainty as impossible, tried to found a working rule of life on a tentative acceptance of what experience has shown to be 'probable'. Where scepticism was combined with an inquisitive interest in the world of experience, as it was by the *empirical* school of medicine, it was a valuable safeguard against the tyranny of far-fetched 'hypotheses'. But to the common man, the bewildered citizen of a changing world, it seemed that the Sceptics were logically committed either to complete inaction or to acquiescence in outworn customs or their own individual caprice. For guidance, and still more for encouragement, he looked elsewhere. Standing hesitantly at the cross-roads, he gazed at a guide-post whose three arms beckoned him along three very different paths.

#### (a) *Cynicism*

The first arm pointed uncompromisingly back along the road by which men had emerged from barbarism. Its teaching was embodied in that strange company of sturdy vagabonds who earned a celebrated nickname from their *cynic* (i.e. 'doggyish') contempt for the traditional decencies and taboos of social intercourse. The Cynics boasted that they were 'shameless, passionless and wantless', physically and mentally tough, and therefore free. They claimed to derive their doctrine from Socrates through his disciple Antisthenes, who stressed the Master's leaning towards the simple life. But the real founder of the order was Diogenes of Sinopé, centre of a thousand fables but very few undoubted facts. He died not long after Alexander, having followed in his later years the life of a roving beggar, with no home but the famous 'tub' and no property but a folded cloak, a staff and a wallet: on seeing a lad drinking from a public fountain out of his cupped hand, he had thrown away his drinking-cup as a useless encumbrance. Strong in his lordly indifference to the cares of common humanity, Diogenes poured scorn on the restless ambition of rulers, the narrow loyalty of patriots, the windy speculations of philosophers, the false values of artists (which caused a statue to be rated above a peck of corn) and the enslavement of all mankind to tormenting desires for things they could well do without.

A more lovable figure was Diogenes' admirer Crates, who abandoned his possessions and embraced Lady Poverty in something of the spirit of St. Francis. No door at Athens, it is said, was barred against this kindly guest, primed with sage advice on the petty domestic problems that contribute so heavily to the sum of human misery. No piece of Cynic shamelessness was a bigger shock to Greek feeling than Crates' love-match with a girl of good family who elected to share his penury and hardships.

For many centuries the Graeco-Roman world was familiar with satirists who donned the Cynic cloak as a literary device and importunate beggars who wore it as part of their stock in trade. But the Cynic teaching was too negative and too individualistic to form the basis of a creed, much less a practical policy of reform.

(though we find the genuine reformer Cercidas praising 'Diogenes the Heavenly Dog'). Unlike the mendicant orders of Christendom or Hindustan, the Cynics did not normally value their freedom as a means to mystic contemplation. They claimed that it had been Diogenes' mission to 'debase the currency' of false ideals. In its place they had no positive ideal to offer but that of 'life according to nature'. By this they did not mean, as certain Sophists had done, the law of the jungle—'might is right'. They meant rather that men should suppress all longings but those simple animal desires which can and must be satisfied. In theory at least, they defended as 'natural' even incest and cannibalism—at a time when, as Plutarch supposed, these barbarities were vanishing from inmost Asia before the onward march of Greek civilization. Some Cynics, however, flouted nature, and life itself, as scornfully as convention. The slogan 'better madness than pleasure' (attributed to Antisthenes) would scarcely commend itself to their model the dog. And even a Hindu pessimist could hardly have outdone the assertion of one Cynic that the extinction of the human race would be of no more account than the disappearance of flies or wasps.

In this disgruntled mood we recognize the first clear utterance in Hellas of that revolt against civilization which had long been a commonplace of Eastern thought. The Cynic indictment of civilization is summed up in a fictitious 'Letter of Diogenes', probably written in the 1st Century B.C.

'To the so-called Greeks, Diogenes the Dog wishes unhappiness. You have it anyhow, whether I wish it or not. Men in show, apes in soul, pretending to everything, understanding nothing, you pay the penalty to Nature. Enacting laws for yourselves as witnesses to your innate wickedness, you have reaped only vanity. You live out your lives in war, not peace, rogues consorting with rogues, consumed with envy if another's cloak is a trifle softer, his purse a trifle better lined, his tongue more ready or his wits more tutored. You judge nothing by sound reason, but falling victims to the specious and the plausible, you and your forbears alike, you grumble at everything but know nothing. The dupes of ignorance and folly, you live on the rack—and very properly. You have incurred the hatred not only of the Dog but of Nature herself. You have little joy and much pain, before marriage or after, because you embark upon it already depraved and cantankerous. How many men you have killed, some in war provoked by your own greed, others in so-called peace on some charge or other! So multitudes are crucified or knifed, poisoned or broken on the wheel, and all because they pass for wrong-doers. Is it better then, you damned rascals, to put men to death than to educate them? We have no need of corpses, unless we are to eat them as sacrificial victims; but of good men there is the utmost need—you damned rascals. To the unlettered and uncultured you teach the so-called arts of the Muses, that you may use them at your need. Why should you not teach right-doing to wrong-doers to serve your need? . . . Is it that you have need of wrong-doers to betray a city or an army? . . .

'When you have perverted your very dogs from a true and natural life, do you not sin against them? You are punished all alike, by me the Dog in words, by Nature in act. For over all alike hangs the death that terrifies you. How often have I seen the poor preserved in health by their penury, the rich diseased by gluttony and debauchery! . . . You will have no profit of your mansions and your colonnades, but reclining on your gold and silver couches you are on the rack—and very properly . . . And, while you wallow in the good things of which you call yourselves masters, up come those public executioners whom you call doctors, who do and say whatever comes into their stomachs. They proceed, very properly, to hack you and

burn you and bind you up and apply poisonous drugs internally and externally. And, if you recover, you thank the gods; if not, you blame the doctors. . . .

'So I bid you, barbarians that you are, to persist in your unhappiness till you learn to be Greeks indeed. At present the so-called barbarians are much better behaved than you. You are the aggressors, and they merely think fit to defend their own land, which suffices them. But for you nothing suffices; for you are as covetous as you are senseless—the products of a worthless upbringing.' (*Epistle* 28.)

(b) *Epicureanism*

While the Cynics were urging men to live according to a 'nature' that was largely imaginary, a rival sect appealed to a 'nature' that squared far more closely with actual human experience. The most elementary fact of experience is that we are conscious of certain sensations, some of which we seek after as 'pleasurable', others we avoid as 'painful', while to others we are practically indifferent, except that we can use them to construct a picture of the external world which may help us to direct our actions. It was to these universal sensations and impulses of the ordinary man that Epicurus appealed against the old wives' tales of popular religion and the fine-spun arguments of the philosophers. He maintained that things are in truth just what they seem to be to any close observer; that the only possible rule of conduct is provided by men's inborn inclination towards pleasure and aversion from pain; that the wise man is he who has learnt, from observation or true report of things as they are, what course is likeliest to lead to the 'pleasure' he inevitably desires. On this basis of common sense he built the most compact and self-contained mansion in the whole street of ancient philosophy.

Pleasure had already been proclaimed as the sole good by the Cyrenaic school, whose founder Aristippus of Cyrené claimed (like so many others) to be interpreting the real meaning of his master Socrates. Aristippus seems to have been a virtuoso in the art of life, capable of savouring its manifold pleasures without being stabbed too sharply by its pains. His main contention was that men should 'master pleasure and not be mastered by it'; they should 'possess and not be possessed'; they should seek to enrich their lives with high spots of 'momentaneous pleasure'. A later Cyrenaic with a less happy temperament found that, on this system, pleasures were heavily outweighed by pains; he earned the title 'Death's Advocate' by inducing so many of his pupils to commit suicide that the tolerant authorities at Alexandria had to intervene to suppress his classes.

Epicurus understood 'pleasure' in a very different sense, not as excitement but as peace of body and mind, freedom from pain and from fear. Other pleasures were merely returns to this state after a painful interlude of desire; the wise man would realize that they could add nothing to the positive 'good' of tranquillity and were inseparable from an element of 'evil'—*i.e.* pain. Bodily pain could not be completely avoided, but it could be endured; at the worst, it would never be both severe and prolonged. Fear was a worse evil, but more easily remedied. It was largely due to false notions about the world instilled into the young and never wholly shaken off by the adult.

As children in the dark, so we by day  
Are plagued with fears as substanceless as theirs

(Lucretius, II, 55-57)

Except from Epicurean writers, we do not get the impression that this pall of superstitious terrors hung very darkly over the ancient world; it is much less obtrusive than the shadow of hell-fire over certain phases of Christian history. But



we know that even Greek society was held together partly by such supernatural sanctions, and it is interesting that to some minds they appeared to be the prime cause of human suffering.

To banish these bogeys, all that Epicurus judged necessary was a true understanding of the 'causes of things'. Though the world revealed by our senses is full of confusing and conflicting appearances, some of which suggest the intervention of a capricious deity, he believed that all these could be accounted for by the regular behaviour of particles of matter moving in space. This was substantially the atomic theory of Democritus. But Epicurus tidied it up and made certain innovations that seemed to him essential for the practical purpose of guiding men's actions and setting their minds at rest. In particular, in order to account for human free will, he supposed that the atoms occasionally swerve ever so little from the straight path—a notion curiously like some modern interpretations of quantum phenomena. Though the atoms were infinite in number and fell through infinite space, they were restricted to a finite number of shapes and therefore of possible combinations. Only certain things could exist or happen, though the atomic swerve left room for indeterminacy in individual occurrences including those 'sense-giving movements' of the atoms of mind and soul in the human body that make up human thought and will. Death was the dispersal of these mind and soul atoms. Though they would later be recombined in other living bodies, this was the end of the individual personality. If each man would realize that, so far as he is concerned, death is literally nothing, it would lose all its terrors, and men could turn to the wise enjoyment of life.

Epicurus believed in the existence of gods for the sound materialistic reason that the images of them which impinged on our mind-atoms must come from somewhere. But they were powerless to affect the course of nature, and their Epicurean serenity was as undisturbed by pity for human suffering as it was by resentment at human sin. To the enlightened worshipper they were helpful as examples of true blessedness.

The essence of the Epicurean gospel is summed up in a text which one zealous disciple (Diogenes of Oenoanda) set up on a 'wayside pulpit':

Gods—we need not fear them.  
Death—is free from pain.  
Evils—we can bear them.  
Good—we can attain.

A few points may be further illustrated by these extracts from one of Epicurus' own letters.

'No one is too young or too old for philosophy, as no one is too young or too old for happiness . . . Give your mind then to the things that bring about happiness, having which we have everything, lacking which we do everything in order to have it . . .

'First, think of a god as an immortal and blessed being, and attribute to him nothing alien to immortality and blessedness . . . The impious man is not one who disbelieves in the gods of the multitude, but one who attaches to gods the opinions of the multitude. . . .

'Get used to the thought that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil is in feeling, but death is absence of feeling . . . So the evil we most dread is nothing: for, where we are, death is not; where death is, we are not . . .

'Bear in mind that some desires are natural, others empty. Of the former, some are merely natural; others are also necessary, either for happiness or for bodily relief or for life itself. The unerring contemplation of these facts teaches us what to choose and what to shun in our quest for health of body and peace of mind, which is the aim of the blessed life. . . . A great

source of health is to get used to a simple way of life; this also releases us for the necessary occupations of life, helps us to enjoy luxuries more when they come our way and delivers us from the fear of fortune. It is not revelry and debauchery nor a table laden with delicacies that beget a pleasant life, but sober reflection, which tracks down the causes of our voluntary actions and drives out those opinions by which chiefly the soul is storm-tost.

'Some things happen by necessity, others by chance, but others again depend on ourselves. It is better to yield to the fable of the gods than to the determinism of the natural philosophers;<sup>1</sup> for the one holds out a hope of placating the gods by worship, the other confronts us with implacable necessity. As for Chance, the wise man does not deem it a god, as the multitude do, nor yet an inconstant cause of good and evil, but an opportunity for good or evil; so he would rather act reasonably with luck against him than unreasonably with luck on his side . . .

'Think therefore on these things day and night, and share your thoughts with one like-minded, and waking or sleeping you will never be troubled but will live like a god among men. For a man is in no wise like a mortal if he lives amidst things immortally good.' (*Letter to Menoeceus*.)

It is obvious that the Epicurean aimed only at his own personal salvation. He conformed to most of the precepts of conventional morality, but only as conducive to his own happiness. He acknowledged no obligation to God or man. The gods did not care what he did, and as for human society—there was no such thing, only a swarm of self-centred individuals like himself, with whom he must rub along somehow. He welcomed friendship as a potent aid to happiness. He accepted the restraints of 'justice' as a necessary compromise between conflicting interests. Having no Cynic bias towards the simple life as such, he recognized how much better (*i.e.* pleasanter) life had been made by intelligent co-operation; but, strictly speaking, it was against his principles (if not his practice) to vex his mind by making any personal contribution to the public welfare.

The Epicurean attempt to explain the growth of civilization as a purely natural process may be illustrated by a few passages from Lucretius' Latin poem *On the Nature of Things* (1st Century B.C.), which is our most comprehensive as well as our most inspiring exposition of the whole creed.

Nor knew they yet with fire their toil to ease  
Or clothe their frames with trophies of the chase;  
Their haunt the caverned crags, the greenwood trees,  
Thick bushes were their rough limbs' couching-place,  
Their shelter from the lash of wind and shower  
To heed the common good or bind the race  
With laws and customs lay not in their power,  
Each fending for himself seized on such prey  
As fortune offered In some leafy bower  
Lover would lie with lover neath the sway  
Of mutual joy or the male's mastering lust;  
Or berries ripe or nuts love's price would pay.  
In strength of hand and foot they put their trust,  
Hunting the woodland brutes with swift flung stone  
Or ponderous club, till many bit the dust,  
While from some few they hid

(v. 953-969)

The poet then enlarges on the troubles of the cave man's life: the intrusion of lions and other unwelcome guests into his chosen abode; his barbaric lamentation

<sup>1</sup> Chiefly Democritus. Cf. G. B. Shaw (Preface to 1 A. Wilson's *Miraculous Birth of Language*, 1939) 'The Darwinians' set up a 'creed called Determinism, compared to which the story of Noah was cheerful and encouraging.'

for the dead; the festering of untended wounds. But he points out that wholesale deaths by battle and shipwreck are among the gifts of civilization. Then comes progress.

When first men fashioned huts and fire and furs  
And man and wife, by lasting ties confined,  
Cared for a common offspring, his and hers,  
Then milder grew the mood of humankind.  
Their fire-warmed bodies could no more find rest  
Neath freezing skies. Venus brute force refined.  
The hard of heart, by baby hands caressed,  
Grew gentle. Neighbours, linked with neighbours, swore  
That neither should oppress or be oppressed;  
That not in vain should womanhood implore  
And infancy with signs and formless cries  
For pity on the weak: which covenant bore  
No fruit of concord perfect everywise;  
Yet the more part kept faith; else had none lived  
From whom the seed of after years might rise. (v, 1011-1027.)

Lucretius proceeds to illustrate how men discovered the use of fire, for instance, by seeing trees set ablaze by lightning or their branches rubbing together in the wind; and how they were similarly prompted by nature in all their inventions—metalwork (in bronze and later in iron), stock-breeding, agriculture, music, speech, religion, government and war. He sums up:

So seacraft, tillage, city walls and laws,  
Weapons and highways, clothing, currency,  
And all the arts, the joy of life that cause,  
Music and painting, polished statuary,  
These usage taught and long experience  
Of the unresting mind laboriously  
Plodding ahead; years and intelligence  
Brought each to daylight; in slow-creeping time  
One after other dawned on human sense  
Till, perfected by art, they reached their prime.  
(v, 1448-1457.)

Epicurus was no doubt quite sincere in his appeal to the plain man against the highbrow. He adjures one young disciple to 'crowd on all sail away from every form of culture' (*paideia*). His suspicion of mathematical subtleties led him to despise the solid astronomical knowledge of his contemporaries no less than the lore of the astrologer. Yet he says truly that he 'never tried to please the masses'. His early success in winning followers may be attributed rather to his genial personality than to any specially popular feature in his doctrine. It mattered little that the learned picked holes in his metaphysics and his logic. The masses repudiated his gospel because of an error in psychology—they were neither as rational nor as selfish as he supposed. He found converts chiefly among the ultra-selfish, who welcomed this pretext for self-indulgence, and among the ultra-rational, who shared his hatred of superstition and humbug and longed for a reasonable explanation of the world. The Epicureans were an influential minority among the upper classes of the Graeco-Roman world for many centuries, retaining something of the founder's easy-going humanitarianism but little of his passionate desire to lay bare 'the causes of things'.

### (c) *Stoicism*

One day, not long after the death of Alexander and not many years before Epicurus opened his school in the *Garden* at Athens, an Athenian bookseller was sitting at his stall reading aloud from one of Xenophon's Socratic Dialogues. Among those who stopped to listen was a young man of about 30—lanky, gaunt and sallow. He bore the Greek name of Zeno, but he was the son of Mnaseas

(the Semitic *Manasseh*) and he had come as a trader from the Phoenician city of Citium in Cyprus. His ship with its cargo of purple dye had foundered not far from the Piraeus. But the shipwrecked merchant was not thinking of his lost merchandise but of this new-found treasure of wisdom. "Where," he asked, "were such men as Socrates to be found now?" By a happy chance the gentle Cynic Crates was passing that way, and the bookseller, who must have been taken aback by this poser, had only to point and say: "Follow him."

This anecdote, whose truth we can only take on trust, gives us one of our rare glimpses of a remarkable personality who inspired the religious thought of Europe for some six centuries. Zeno studied eagerly the various Greek philosophies of the day; but he remained a Semite at heart, and his own lectures in the Painted Portico (*Stoa*) at Athens had something of the impassioned eloquence of a Hebrew prophet. His successor Cleanthes we may fairly call a psalmist. It was the tidy mind of Chrysippus, with its vast store of learning, that first crystallized the Stoic view of life into a coherent system. In the 1st Century B.C., Stoicism was coloured by the far-ranging genius of Posidonius, who sought to embrace the whole realm of the natural and the supernatural; and (partly through his teaching) it found a new home among those hard-headed disciplined aristocrats who ruled the Roman Republic.

Of the extensive Stoic literature of these first two centuries only a few fragments survive. And later Stoics (Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius) illustrate the application of the creed to the problems of daily life rather than its philosophic tenets, even in the modified form current under the Roman Empire. Even if our sources were more adequate, it would still be difficult to summarize a body of doctrine which, in contrast to the consistency and stability of Epicureanism, seems exasperatingly fluid. Plutarch has no difficulty in showing that the Stoics freely contradict not only one another but themselves. The contradiction, indeed, lay at the very heart of their creed: they held up a more exacting ideal of human conduct than had ever been preached before, and at the same time they proclaimed that this simply meant 'living according to nature'.

'Chrysippus asserts that the reason [or 'doctrine', *logos*] concerning good and evil which he introduces and approves is in full accord with life and has the firmest grasp on man's innate presumptions. Elsewhere he says that this reason drags us away from all things besides, as from things that are nothing to us and do not contribute to our happiness. See how well he accords with himself! That which drags us away from life, from health, from comfort, from the normal functioning of the senses, and maintains that these blessings for which we pray to the gods are nothing to us—this, he declares, is in full accord with life and our common presumptions. He even acknowledges the contradiction himself so far as to remark: "Wherefore, and because of the transcendence of greatness and beauty, we seem to utter things resembling fictions and not according to man and human nature."'<sup>1</sup>

The Stoics identified the good with the 'natural' not merely to gain the semblance of solid support for a most unnatural code of behaviour, but because the goodness of nature was a direct consequence of the goodness of God, and this was in fact the foundation of their whole system—though they believed that it was the coping-stone of a lofty structure of unshakable reasoning.

'Chrysippus thinks the young ought to study first logic, then ethics, then natural science (*physikē*) and last of all theology. But in practice he

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch: *On the Contradictions of the Stoics*, 1041.

prefaces every ethical enquiry with reasoning about the gods, which he says ought to come last. As proposers of public decrees always begin with the phrase 'Good luck', so Chrysippus never utters a word about the aims of action, or about justice, or good and evil, or marriage and the upbringing of children, without a preliminary reference to Zeus or Destiny or Providence or the holding together of the universe as a single perfect whole by a single power—none of which can be demonstrated without diving deeply into the study of nature.

'Hear what he says in his book *On the Gods*: "For it is not possible to find any other starting-point or origin of justice than that from Zeus and from Universal Nature. For everything must start from there, if we are to speak of good and evil."

'Again, in his *Natural Propositions*, he says: "There is no other or apter way of approaching the reason (*logos*) of good and evil or the virtues or happiness than from Universal Nature or the Governance of the Universe."<sup>1</sup>

This conviction of the fundamental goodness of things is one of those divine truths of which Cleanthes observed that they were more aptly expressed through the medium of poetry or music than by the reasoning of philosophy. It is most forcibly conveyed by Cleanthes himself in a poem which reveals the emotional drive behind the dry logic of the *Stoa*.

Heav'n's Lord, whom men by many titles know,  
Nature's all-potent generalissimo,  
Who guidest all by law, thee Zeus I greet,  
To whom the homage of all tongues is meet.  
Thy children we,<sup>2</sup> of all earth's habitants  
In godhead's image sole participants.  
Thee will I hymn and chant thy puissance still.  
The cosmos, gladly yielding to thy will,  
Wheels round this earthly sphere as thou dost guide,  
So strong a tool in thy strong hands is plied,  
The two-edged, fiery, quenchless levin brand  
Whose blows build Nature's works as thou hast planned  
With Reason in each member immanent,  
Through great and lesser luminaries blent.  
No work on earth is wrought apart from thee  
Or in the ethereal vault or in the sea,  
Save deeds of sinful men done wantonly.  
But thou to even canst transmute the odd,  
Ordering disorder, making dear to God  
What was not dear to man, attuning worse  
To better in one jarless universe  
Where Reason rules, vainly by men eschewed,  
Fond wretches, ever covetous of good  
But to God's common ordinance deaf and blind  
Wherein alone the good life is to find.  
So each aspires to his peculiar ill:  
One thirsts for glory, breeder of ill will;  
One toils for gain that disarrays his state;  
One sinks in sloth and swallows pleasure's bait.  
Each reaps the opposite of his desire.  
But thou, All-giver, Lord of Cloud and Fire,  
Scatter curst folly, Father, from man's soul;  
Grant that wise mind whereby thou dost control  
All things aright, that we may earn and give  
Honour for honour and adoring live.  
For man or god has won life's crowning height  
Who hymns thy universal law aright

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 1035. Plutarch, a true Greek, cannot understand the direct 'Hebraic' approach to God. It is noteworthy that all the outstanding figures of the early *Stoa* were Asiatics.

<sup>2</sup> It is often said that Paul was referring to this poem in *Acts* xvii, 28. But the same thought is expressed by Aratus of Soli, and it was indeed a commonplace of Stoic writers.

This mood of exultant submission touched the ordinary man with far more force than Epicurus' appeal to enlightened self-interest and self-reliance. Those who had shared the spiritual experience were willing to listen to the verbal subtleties by which Chrysippus sought to justify their faith. His task was not easy. For this was the mood of men who looked at life with a double vision, striving desperately to bring two images into focus. The universe, they felt, was perfect; and man, the embodiment of divine Reason, was in his true nature the most perfect part of it. But they also felt, in face of the divine perfection, that they were miserable sinners. They were free to choose between good and evil; but of course nothing they might do could interfere with the divine plan.

Fate leads men, willing, willing not, she drags

Therefore an act could not be judged by its effects, which were necessarily good, but only by the agent's intention to conform to an absolute law of right and wrong.

'To live virtuously is to live according to experience of what happens by nature. For our natures are part of the nature of the whole. The aim of action therefore is to live conformably to nature, that is, to the nature of the agent and to that of the universe, doing nothing that is forbidden by the universal law, which is the right law running through everything, which is one with Zeus, the controller of the governance of all that is. This likewise is the virtue and smooth flowing of the happy life, when everything is done in harmony with each man's guiding spirit (*daemon*) according to the will of the governor of the universe.' (Diogenes Laertius, vii, 87, quoting Chrysippus.)

The good man is the wise man, who knows that all things are ordered for the best. He is also the supremely happy man, since he will not assent to the false proposition that anything that happens to him can possibly be an evil. He will not be side-tracked from the straight path by subsidiary motives, such as pity or affection: it may sometimes be his duty to make a show of such emotions, but he must never feel them. The man who falls short of this supreme standard, no matter by how little, entirely misses the right, and therefore misses happiness, as a man will drown as thoroughly just below the surface as at 500 fathoms. But, alas, where is this wise man to be found? Chrysippus himself admitted that he had not reached this level of wisdom and knew none who had. The Stoic signpost seemed to point only to a sheer cliff, too steep for human climbing.

Here, however, we meet another contradiction. So far we might infer that the Stoic, like the Epicurean, was a free self-sufficient individual, similarly bent on his personal salvation or peace of mind, though with far less hope of attaining it. But the very word 'individual', a Latin translation of the Greek *atomos*, expresses an Epicurean notion wholly alien to Stoicism. To the Stoic neither the material universe nor human society was a mere concourse of atoms. They were wholes, or rather the same whole, a *system* whose members had no real existence apart from it.

'Chrysippus says that the universe (*cosmos*) is a system consisting of heaven and earth and the natures therein; or the system of gods and men and the things that exist for their sake. Alternatively he applies the name *cosmos* to God, by whom orderly arrangement (*diacosmesis*) is brought about and perfected.' (Stobaeus, i, 444.)

So, paradoxically enough, while the Stoics placed the true good of the individual in the moral perfection of his own will, irrespective of outward circumstances,

they also taught that he was a mere member or limb for whom nothing was good except what was good for the whole. Here speaks a later, but fairly orthodox, Stoic.

'Consider who you are. First, a man—that is, one who has nothing more sovereign than his will, but all else subordinate to it and itself without a master and subordinate to none. Consider then from what you are set apart by the gift of reason. You are set apart from the beasts, both wild and tame. Moreover, you are a citizen of the world, not a menial but promoted to high office; for you are capable of apprehending the divine governance and understanding consequences. What then is the calling of a citizen? To turn nothing to private profit, to decide nothing as an isolated entity, but to behave like the hand or the foot, which, if they were endowed with reason and could apprehend the natural order, would have no ambitions or desires except by reference to the whole. Therefore the philosophers say well that, if the good man could foresee the future, he would co-operate even with sickness or death or mutilation, perceiving that these are duly apportioned by the power that directs the whole, and the whole is more sovereign than the part and the city than the citizen. But now, since we lack foreknowledge, it is our duty to hold to what has the better nature for choice, because it is even to that end that we are born.' (Epictetus: *Discourses*, ii, 10.)

Epictetus goes on to point out that the individual may stand in other relations—as son or brother or father or civic functionary—and that each of these entails its own obligations.

While Stoic theorists always strove to reconcile the two ideals of individual perfection and common welfare, practical exponents of Stoic morals tended more and more to stress the latter. In private life there was no sharp clash between the paramount claim of absolute right and the lower claims of social duty. But what of public life? Was the Stoic to keep his spirit unruffled and his conscience unstained by steering clear of public affairs, like the Epicurean, acknowledging with Chrysippus that it is impossible to please both gods and men? Or was he rather to perform in the world-wide 'city of Zeus' the traditional duties of a good citizen? Plutarch detects here another 'contradiction'.

'The philosopher's doctrine is a self-chosen and personal law, for those who account philosophy not a mere game or display of verbal jugglery but a task to be pursued with the utmost seriousness, which it is. Yet, though much was written by Zeno and Cleanthes and a vast deal by Chrysippus about statecraft, ruling and being ruled, passing judgement and public speaking, we cannot find in the life of any one of them that he held a magistracy, proposed a law, addressed a Civic Council, pleaded a suit, fought for his country, served on an embassy or made a gift to the state. But throughout their long lives, having tasted of leisure as it were a lotus-fruit, they lived abroad in the midst of doctrines and books and discussions.' (*On the Contradictions of the Stoics*, 1033.)

This is hardly a fair criticism. Zeno's Athenian contemporaries probably judged more justly when they inscribed on his tombstone that 'he practised what he preached'. The Stoic was faced not only by the perennial difficulty of applying counsels of perfection to practical politics but by the decay of free political institutions in the Hellenistic world. He was in much the same plight as the Confucian scholar amid the turmoil of the Warring States. There were no vacancies for officials to govern the 'World City'. In actual cities politics was becoming a

game, attractive only to Theophrastus' 'Self-important Man'. The big empires were ruled by arbitrary despots and pliable courtiers. But whenever an opening appeared for the application of political philosophy, a Stoic was ready to step in. Antigonos II of Macedonia was an intimate of Zeno and accepted one of his pupils as spiritual adviser. The social revolution of Cleomenes at Sparta was inspired by Sphaerus, a left-wing Stoic on the verge of Cynicism. In the last century of the Roman Republic and under the early Empire the more idealistic statesmen were avowed Stoics, mainly of the aristocratic right wing. In the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius it almost seemed that *Cosmopolis* had found its philosopher king.

Yet, while the Stoics did much to humanize society and to bring statutory laws into harmony with the 'law of Nature', there was something half-hearted about their reforms. They lacked the intolerant fire of a single purpose, because they lacked the clarity of a single vision. They condemned slavery, for instance, as contrary to nature and to the brotherhood of man, but condoned it as something not essentially evil, since the slave might still be free in soul—a tonic doctrine for the Stoic slave, such as Epictetus, but a soothing syrup for his master.

In the same broad-minded spirit the Stoics made terms with popular religion. Zeno indeed rejected the gods of mythology more emphatically than Epicurus, and his physical theories were expressed in no less materialistic language, though instead of the atoms of Democritus he adopted the ever-flowing fire of Heraclitus. But, while he thought it foolish that temples should be built by mere human labourers for the worship of the divine, his whole system was founded on worship. Cleanthes might glow with white-hot ardour for an intellectual abstraction; but the average worshipper needed something that would appeal more vividly to his senses and his imagination. So Stoicism, like so many other religious systems (Taoism, Buddhism, not least Christianity), gradually found room for a ritual and a mythology which, however beautiful in themselves, were far from the intention of the founder. The Stoics did not deify or canonize the founders of their faith. Instead, they gave a philosophic blessing to traditional rites and myths by reading into them a profound significance of which (as Cicero justly observes) the inventor himself had never had an inkling. They were the first to apply on a large scale that elastic code of allegorical interpretation which Jews and Christians afterwards found so convenient. The following sample will serve to illustrate also the Stoic theory of the divinely inspired growth of civilization.

'The Ancients called the earth *Hestia* from its standing fast (*hestanai*) or *Demeter*, i.e. Earth Mother, because mother-like it generates and nurtures all things. Hestia is represented as a virgin because motionlessness is generative of nothing (wherefore her ministers [The Roman *Vestals*] also are virgins); but Demeter is the mother of *Koré*, i.e. satiety (*koros*) . . . As the giver of grain she is appropriately depicted crowned with corn ears; for this is the most indispensable of the gifts lavished upon men by cultivated food. The myth relates that *Triptolemus* of Eleusis sowed this throughout the world from a chariot drawn by winged *dragons* in which he was borne aloft by Demeter. We may suppose that some such person was the first of the Ancients to behold (*drakein*) and conceive the preparation of barley, being borne aloft by some god to a higher flight of intelligence, whence he was named the Groat-grinder (*tripsas oulas*). Demeter's daughter was said to have been ravished by *Hades* because of the temporary disappearance of seeds underground. To this was added the fasting of the goddess and her quest throughout the world, with the same significance as the Egyptian tale of Isis' quest and discovery of Osiris, or the Phoenician tale of *Adonis* spending



six months above ground and six underground, the fruits of Demeter being so called from their satisfying (*hadein*) men.<sup>1</sup>

Though such interpretation was meant to explain the gods away, its effect was to give a wider currency to their histories and an active encouragement to their worship, till in time even the educated became more and more inclined to accept them as actual personages.

Through the wide gateway of allegory the Stoics admitted into the City of Zeus not only the comparatively innocent Olympians but a motley host of intruders from the East, especially the 'principalities and powers' associated with Mesopotamian star-worship and the delusive science of the Mages. So the free citizens of a rational universe came under the despotic sway of Oriental fatalism, exercised through mysterious astrological 'influences' and tempered only by the intervention of capricious *daemons*. It was some consolation for their weakening grasp on the realities of the perceptible world that they saw a promise in the spirit-world of some sort of personal survival—at least till the hour when spirit and matter alike would be dissolved into the cosmic fire and the world's great age would begin anew.

The Stoics were fairly consistent opponents of certain tendencies of their age. Without sharing the Cynic contempt for the ties and taboos of society, they condemned by the same standards as the Cynics the growth of material civilization—it was not so much the hardship of the impoverished classes that seemed to them an evil as the increasing luxury of the rich. Having pegged their religious convictions to a questionable theory about the physical universe, they could not tolerate absolute freedom of scientific enquiry: Cleanthes, for instance, denounced the impiety of Aristarchus in suggesting that the earth was not the centre of the universe. Nevertheless, the Stoic philosophy or religion, with its wide range of ideals and moods adapted to all intellectual and emotional levels, is the most characteristic product of Hellenistic civilization. Herein we may see, fantastically mirrored, the breakdown of the city-state and the struggle towards a unified world order; the intermingling of Greek and Barbarian; the popularization of an aristocratic culture; the loneliness of the uprooted individual face to face with the universe; the 'failure of nerve' and the groping for a new faith—a more vital apprehension of the Unknown God. But we are vouchsafed no clear-cut and exhilarating vision of the New Jerusalem. The Stoic might demonstrate by incontestable arguments that this best of all possible worlds is specially made for man. He might even cherish a hesitant hope of immortality. But he remained sad at heart—sadder (we cannot but feel) than the Epicurean with his sturdy acceptance of a brief span of years on an unfriendly but not incomprehensible earth. And both alike found solace in the thought that, when life proved too much for their philosophy, no power on earth could bar the exit-door of suicide.

## XV

### THE SAVAGE CONQUEROR

**A**MONG the Hellenized peoples of the 3rd Century B.C., as in contemporary China, we have found a strong drive towards unity even at the cost of liberty. Their most influential teachers no longer equated culture and morals with the 'politics' of the city-state or accepted the barrier between Hellene and Barbarian as a permanent feature of human geography. The idea of the universal state, which

<sup>1</sup> Cornutus: *Compendium of Greek Theology*, 28. The etymology of *Demeter* is probably correct—almost the only one in the book for which such a claim can be made.

had scarcely dawned on the Greek mind when Alexander attempted to actualize it, was growing clearer and (to use a Stoic expression) more 'gripping' despite his failure. Those Greeks who had stayed at home were learning to temper their civic patriotism with loyalty to a League or federation. The mingled Greek settlers and Barbarians of the new monarchies developed no strong sense of nationality. There was a growing feeling that the Greek experiment in freedom of act and thought had been a failure. As the price of peace and security it no longer seemed an intolerable thing to submit to absolute authority.

One reason for Alexander's failure had doubtless been that the centre of gravity of his empire was too far to the East. The more easterly provinces, linked to the Mediterranean only by long and difficult land routes, had clung to their native culture and resisted Hellenization. On the other hand, the western Mediterranean coasts, unconquered by Alexander, were being drawn ever closer into the Hellenistic world. The key to the situation was Sicily, the hub of the Mediterranean. More than once it seemed that a tyrant of Syracuse might be the overlord for whom men were looking. When, despite the genius of Archimedes, Syracuse, which had foiled the imperial ambitions of Athens, Epirus and Carthage, opened her gates in 211 B.C. to the legions of Rome, it was already plain to the more far-sighted from what quarter that overlord would come. Two generations later (146 B.C.) the Romans were left without a rival in the 'orb of lands' that girdled what they justifiably called 'our sea'. When another century had passed, Horace could say with truth:

Then captive Greece her savage conqueror  
Did captivate and to the Latin boor  
Gave lessons in the arts.

(*Epistles*, II, i, 156-7.)

If we look beyond the battlefield to the wider field of human life and endeavour, we see that in fact a Hellenistic empire had absorbed not only Roman Italy but the conquests of the Roman legions in territories further west. Though the administrative capital of this empire was at Rome, its cultural and economic heart was in the more fully Hellenized eastern provinces. This became more apparent with the decline in the prestige and privileges of the imperial city. It was officially recognized in A.D. 330, when the capital was transferred to Greek soil by Constantine—who was also the first Emperor to recognize that the Hellenistic world had found its Unknown God. In the 5th Century, Italy and the other western provinces, only half won to Hellenism, relapsed into barbarian twilight. But behind the impregnable ramparts of Constantine's city the Hellenistic culture lingered on for another thousand years into a changed world.

This hasty summary is not meant to imply that the Romans contributed nothing to European civilization but the unifying constraint of their legions. To assess their original contribution, let us turn once more to that fateful day at Syracuse when their contact with Hellenism, hitherto mainly indirect and peaceable, had become direct and violent. From Archimedes, the fine flower of Greek culture, poring over his diagram in the sand, let us shift our gaze to the unknown legionary who butchered him, the 'savage conqueror' personified. We see a stoutly built fellow, not tall by our reckoning but with every muscle in perfect trim, toughened by a score of winters spent at the plough and as many summers of marching 20 miles a day under a cloudless Mediterranean sky, clad in steel helmet, breastplate and greaves, carrying a large shield, two javelins and a sword, besides a water-bottle, two or three days' provision of flour and usually a pick-axe and a few wooden stakes with which, when the day's march is over, he may have to lend a hand at making a strongly fortified camp for the night. He is the sort of man every general wishes to command—tireless, unimaginative, unquestioningly patriotic, infinitely obedient, ruthless on duty but doubtless a kind-hearted

fellow in his off hours, a faithful husband, an affectionate father, a pious worshipper of his rustic gods. But higher mathematics—Hercules defend us!

Almost certainly he is illiterate. He may have witnessed with half-comprehending laughter a boisterous performance of some sample of the Greek New Comedy, done into Latin with added horseplay and a blunting of the finer points by the Romanized South Italian Plautus. He may even have heard readings from a Latin version of the *Odyssey* by the Greek captive Livius Andronicus. But at most his mind can have been but lightly touched by that cosmopolitan culture—a hotch-potch of Homeric myth, popular philosophy and Oriental religion—that made up the mental background of his Hellenized contemporaries. In its place were the rustic folklore and matter-of-fact traditions of a nation of slow-witted peasant soldiers with a strong grip on political realities. Already the Greek genius had begun to transform both the historical and the religious background of Barbarian Rome into a glittering pageant worthy of its heroic present. Though we cannot reconstruct either in its native simplicity, we can still pick out a few salient features.

### *The Historical Background<sup>1</sup>*

Late in the 3rd Century B.C. a Roman noble, Quintus Fabius Pictor, wrote a history of his people in Greek, as had been done in the same century by Manetho for the Egyptians and by Berossus for the Mesopotamians. Though the Romans had scarcely yet begun to think of their own language as a medium for literary expression, they had adopted a form of the Greek alphabet from the Etruscans in the 6th Century at latest. Fabius may thus have had at his disposal some written sources going back to the beginning of the Republic (509 B.C.?) or even further—lists of the annual magistrates, laws and treaties and the priestly records of temple foundations and of comets, pestilences, famines, wars and other portents. It is clear, however, that these sources left room for many gaps and discrepancies in the record of events. There was also a lively oral tradition, partly enshrined perhaps in heroic ballads such as Cato (c. 200 B.C.) believed to have been current in former times. When the Romans began to create a Latin literature of their own, the meagre narratives of Fabius and the other early chroniclers were swollen to a goodly bulk, partly by interweaving Italian and Greek legend, partly by a process described for us by Cicero.

'Speeches delivered in praise of the dead were preserved by their families as ornaments and as monuments, for use when later members died as well as to commemorate the glories of the house and shed lustre on its nobility. By these eulogies our history has been vitiated. For they contain many things that never happened, such as imaginary triumphs, multiplied consulships and insinuation of men of humbler origin into some other family of the same name.' (*Brutus*, 16.)

The standard version of early Roman history rests on the uncritical use of this artificially padded tradition by moralizing historians of the Augustan Age, especially Livy. While we are entitled to assume that its main episodes are founded on fact, we have few means of checking it, except here and there by archaeological data. Through the laborious years that paved the way for the spectacular climax, we get no authentic glimpse of the Roman people as they appeared to contemporaries in Rome itself or abroad. We see them only as Virgil saw Aeneas:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Strabo, iii, 4 (19): 'Most of what the Roman historians say is translated from the Greek and they contribute very little from their own research.' This, however, applies primarily to Roman histories of foreign nations.

Bearing on proud shoulders  
His children's children's fame and destiny.  
(*Aeneid*, viii, 731.)

In one sense the origins of Rome were less recent and less humble than the Romans themselves supposed. We now know that for some centuries before the generally accepted date of the 'founding of the city' (753 B.C.) the site of Rome was occupied, not by those skin-clad savages whom the Roman poets loved to picture fighting with sticks and stones, but by villagers whose culture was already that of the Iron Age. They were presumably descended in part from the Mediterranean stock that had inhabited Italy in the New Stone Age, but no doubt they spoke an Italic dialect (Latin or Sabine) introduced by Aryan invaders who had crossed the Alps probably somewhere about 2000 B.C. In the mountainous interior these Italic tribes were slow to settle down. Migration was encouraged by an institution that illustrates at once their religious conceptions and their struggles with a harsh environment which could not be made to feed a growing population.

'The Sacred Spring was a mode of sacrifice customary among the Italians. Under stress of great danger they used to vow that they would sacrifice whatever living things might be born among them in the next spring. But, since it seemed cruel to put innocent boys and girls to death, when they had come of age they used to veil them and drive them beyond their boundaries.' (Festus.)

Several times in our scanty records we come across these roving bands, exiled because they were 'sacred' or more accurately 'taboo', winning new territories at the point of the spear.

Like the Israelites, hammered into militant nationhood between the desert nomads and the Philistines, the Latin settlers were forced to struggle for a footing between these turbulent highlanders and the no less aggressive Etruscans, whose cities were spreading over the coastal plain north of the Tiber. And the Latins too sought refuge from this double danger in a unity expressed in religious form, through the common worship of the Latin Jupiter at a 'high place' in the Alban Hills.

The Etruscans, if they were really of Lydian origin,<sup>1</sup> were of kindred stock to the Philistines. In any case they had much in common with them. They were organized in a loose federation of despotically governed cities. Though their civilization rested on sea-power and on commercial and intellectual contact with Greece and the Orient, they did not cling to the coast like the Greeks. In the 6th Century they dominated northern and western Italy from the Po valley to the Bay of Naples, having apparently overrun or encircled the Latin country. The wall paintings and costly grave-furniture of their rock tombs reveal a highly artistic people with a certain gloomy ferocity of temper, finding vent in human sacrifice, and an almost Egyptian preoccupation with the after-life. Incidentally, these paintings seem to have provided the model for the conventional Christian representation of the Devil. Many centuries after the Etruscans (or Tuscans) had been absorbed into the general population of Italy, something of their spirit lingered on, to find expression in the Tuscan art of the Middle Ages and the sombre masterpiece of Dante.

Where Latin territory touched the lands of a kindred people, the Sabines, stood the Seven Hills that form the site of Rome. Economically and strategically important as commanding the lowest convenient crossing of the Tiber, this was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 205). Some authorities hold that they were native (pre-Aryan) Italians and owed the Oriental aspect of their civilization to the retention of an ancient Mediterranean culture and to intercourse by sea with the Phoenicians.

the natural outpost of Latium against Etruria.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to say what truth, if any, may underlie the legendary marriage of the fugitive Trojan prince Aeneas to a daughter of 'King Latinus' and the descent therefrom of Rhomos or Romulus, from whom the city was supposed to derive its name. But Romulus' successor, the Sabine king Numa Pompilius the Law-Giver, may conceivably be a historic figure—a Roman counterpart of Moses—and the tales of the Tarquin dynasty doubtless preserve the memory of a period of Etruscan rule in Rome in the 6th Century. The Etruscans livened the civic ceremony of Rome with the pomp and superstitions of the East: the study of omens from the flight of birds or the shape of entrails according to the rules of the Etruscan diviners long remained an important function of Roman magistrates, and they preserved the regalia of an Etruscan king—the purple-bordered *toga*, the ivory chair of office, the *lictors* marching in front with the symbolic axe and faggot of rods (*fascēs*) which have recently become the tokens of a new absolutism. Through the Etruscans (as well as more directly through Greek colonies, especially Cumae), the Romans also came under the influence of Greek culture. The first Tarquin is said to have been the son of an exiled Corinthian noble who had settled in Etruria.<sup>2</sup> It can scarcely be doubted that the Tarquins were inspired by the example of contemporary Greek 'tyrants', or that the Roman nobles who expelled them (509 B.C.?) were influenced by Greek models in setting up an aristocratic republic and promulgating a code of laws. About this time, too, a number of Greek deities were admitted to a place in the official religion of Rome: a temple built in 493 B.C. (?) for the worship of *Ceres*, *Liber* and *Libera* (identified with the Greek *Demeter*, *Dionysus* and *Persephonē*) was decorated by Greek sculptors.

For the next 200 years, however, the Romans were too much preoccupied in warfare with their immediate neighbours to look much further afield. In 493 (?) they made a formal alliance with the Latin League, in which they soon became the dominant partner. At first their chief foes were the Etruscans. But Etruscan sea-power was broken by the Syracusans at Cumae in 474, and Etruscan land-power by the Kelts (or 'Gauls', as the Romans called them), who invaded Italy in migrant bands about a century before their big inroad into the Balkans. In 390 (? 387) the Gauls sacked Rome itself, all but the fortress of the Capitol. Among other things, they are said to have destroyed the public records, so that this date may mark the transition from legendary to documented history. Eventually the invaders retired and settled in the Po valley. There followed a series of wars against the Samnites of southern Italy, who had been growing into a major power at the expense of the Greek colonists on the coast. By their victory over the combined Samnites and Gauls at Sentinum (295 B.C.) the Romans attained virtual mastery over the Peninsula. In 272, after the abortive invasion of Pyrrhus, they rounded off their conquest by capturing Tarentum, last of the free Greek cities on the soil of Italy.

In this victorious career the Romans were by no means always the aggressors. Their rulers can scarcely have envisaged a consistent policy of imperial expansion. They were not more quarrelsome than their neighbours, nor more rigorously impelled by land-hunger and those other economic urges that stimulated the growth of ancient empires. If the later Romans read their past aright, they were inspired from the beginning with an almost religious devotion to their city and a conviction of her high destiny which made them refuse to accept the most disastrous setback as final. In the words of Lucilius:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Strabo, v, 3 (7): 'In the beginning, when the city was surrounded by rich tracts of foreign soil and its site was exposed to attack, there seemed no reason to regard it as peculiarly favoured; but, when by valour and toil the Romans had made the country their own, there appeared a concourse of blessings transcending all natural excellence.'

<sup>2</sup> Cicero (*Republic*, ii, 34) dates from his reign the first influx into Rome from Greece of 'a swelling flood of sciences and arts'.

Many a field of fight has witnessed Roman armies overcome;  
 Ne'er has war, the all-deciding, ended in defeat of Rome. (*Satires* xxvi)

When the Romans had once got hold, they never let go. As the Latin proverb declared, 'The Roman conquers by sitting down.' Victory was followed by assimilation. A portion of the conquered territory was confiscated as 'people's land' and given to colonies of industrious prolific Roman peasants. In time the natives were admitted to 'Latin rights', *i.e.* their persons and properties were put under the full protection of Roman law without admission to the political privileges of Roman citizenship. Later, by military service or the gradual extension of the franchise, they became full-blown Roman citizens. Perhaps this steady enlargement of the citizen body, more than any other single factor, accounts for the success of Roman, as compared with Greek, imperialism.<sup>1</sup>

Step by step with this external growth went a no less methodical broadening of the basis of power within the state, contrasting forcibly with the violent alternations of oligarchy, democracy and tyranny that made up the political history of the average Greek city. At the beginning of the Republic, political power was confined to the *Patricians*, a hereditary landlord class as exclusive as the Brahman caste in India. They alone could hold the priesthoods and the annual magistracies which had taken the place of the kingship. They thus enjoyed a monopoly of military command and jurisdiction. They alone could sit on the advisory Council of Elders (*Senate*). They dominated the elective and legislative assemblies. While they evidently owed these powers in the first instance to their wealth (*i.e.* their ownership of large estates), they also used their powers, like the Athenian nobles of Solon's day, to increase their wealth still further. It was land-hunger and the burden of debt, rather than any passion for abstract justice, that moved the disfranchised masses (*Plebeians*) to protest against this inequality. They made no direct assault on the formidably buttressed stronghold of Patrician privilege. They undermined it. Their solitary but sufficient weapon was *secession*—a soldiers' strike. It was generally held in reserve, but tradition tells of at least three occasions (in 494, 449 and 287) when they actually used it. They knew their powers and they knew what they wanted. Besides cancellations of debt and other economic concessions, such as the settlement of new colonies on 'people's land', they contrived at every show-down to win some definite political concession, which the Patricians were prudent enough to grant. So they got their own magistrates (the Tribunes of the Plebs), who eventually had power to veto any act of another magistrate. They enforced the publication of written laws (the Twelve Tables of 450 B.C.) to supplement the earlier code. They acquired the right in their own Assembly, from which Patricians were excluded, to pass resolutions (*Plebiscites*) which in time came to have the force of law. The legalization of marriage between the two classes (445 B.C.) paved the way for their eventual fusion.

But, with all this, the Roman spirit remained the reverse of democratic. The personal dependence of poor *clients* on a wealthy *patron* continued to be a conspicuous feature of social life. And even in the last days of the Republic Roman citizens came no nearer in practice to political than to social and economic equality: the Patrician families were almost extinct, but Rome was still ruled by the 'Best People' (*Optimates*), who based their claim to rule on generations of distinguished public service. A 'new man', whose father or grandfather had not held office, had little chance of election in the popular Assembly. This class held its ground because it accepted the duties as well as the privileges of government. The aspirant for the Consulship had first to work his way laboriously through a

<sup>1</sup> This was recognized by Philip V of Macedonia, who urged the citizens of a depopulated town in Thessaly to follow the Roman precedent.

graduated series of increasingly responsible offices (the 'course of honours'), gaining fresh experience at each stage, profiting as a Senator by the collective wisdom of his predecessors in office and imbibing an inherited tradition of prudent and resolute statesmanship. And, within the limits imposed by the class prejudice implicit in that tradition, he generally did his job well. Without going into the details of the constitution, let us look at this sketch of how it appeared as a going concern to Polybius, who lived at Rome for many years from 168 B.C., at first as a captive and later in intimate association with her leading statesman, Scipio the Younger.

'The Romans themselves cannot say whether their constitution is monarchic, aristocratic or democratic, so subtly are these three elements interwoven.

'In Rome itself the [two] *Consuls* are in control of all public affairs, for all the other magistrates except the Tribunes take orders from them. They introduce embassies into the Senate, seek its advice on urgent questions and put its resolutions into effect. They summon Assemblies of the people, refer proposals to them and supervise the execution of majority decisions. In the field, besides supreme military command, they have the power of life and death. Anyone looking only at their share in the government might fairly claim that it was monarchic or kingly.

'The *Senate* controls finance, both income and expenditure. Without its authority the treasurers [*i.e.* the *Quaestors*, the lowest grade in the 'course of honours'] can pay nothing out of the treasury except to the Consuls. It tries all such crimes committed in Italy as call for a public enquiry, hears appeals from individuals or communities, and despatches and receives embassies, and all this without reference to the people, so that to one visiting Rome in the absence of the Consuls it seems a pure aristocracy, as indeed it does to most foreign states who have dealings with it.

'To the *people* is left the conferment of honours and penalties—the chief cement of states and societies and of all human life. The people try serious charges, especially those brought against ex-magistrates and all capital charges, elect to office, approve or disapprove laws, and decide all questions of war and peace, alliances and treaties.

'In the face of danger from without, all these elements enthusiastically co-operate to fulfil their common task. From the temptations of victory and prosperity they are safeguarded by the checks and counterchecks that each element imposes on the others.' (vi, 11-18 [condensed].)

Though the Romans had great faith in individual leadership and at a crisis even suspended their constitution and appointed a temporary despot (*Dictator*), they generally chose as their leaders sound conservatives, trained in the traditional practice of statecraft, rather than the brilliant amateurs who gave such unexpected twists to the growth of the leading Greek cities.

'Cato used to say that the reason why the structure of our state surpassed others was this. In them the constitution had generally been devised by individuals, as in Crete by Minos, in Sparta by Lycurgus, at Athens, with frequent changes, by Theseus, Draco, Cleisthenes, Solon and many others. Our constitution, on the other hand, was not the work of one mind but of many, nor of one life-time but of generations and ages. For no mind was ever so gifted that a single individual could steer clear of all mistakes, nor could all minds acting in concert at one time provide for every possible contingency without prolonged usage and experience.' (Cicero: *Republic*, ii, 2.)

The Roman order discouraged that perilous exercise of the imagination from which spring revolutionary changes. It produced practical men. The Roman might be deficient in scientific curiosity or artistic sensibility. But whatever he made, whether it was a bridge or a constitution, could be relied on to work and to endure.<sup>1</sup> He expressed his thoughts in a stiff ungracious language, from whose rigid struts and tie-beams not even the genius of a Cicero could build a fit dwelling for the airy spirit of Greek philosophy. But the very rigidity of Classical Latin—its sound engineering—has endeared it as an intellectual discipline to many generations of educators (if not to their victims). If the Romans were not interested in defining ideas, they knew well how to define a sphere of action. They had no name for such abstractions as 'aristocracy' and 'democracy', but they early developed means of expressing the different functions of government and delimiting the exact powers of the several functionaries.

Through the swamps and forests of Mediaeval Europe, 1,000 years after the Roman Empire had broken up, there ran a network of solid highways, planned by Roman engineers and worn by the stoutly shod feet of Roman legionaries. And through the thicket of local customs and arbitrary 'liberties' that made up Mediaeval society there ran one unifying thread, the tough and self-consistent fabric of Roman Law. Even as early as the Twelve Tables (whose authors are said to have studied the laws of Solon), Roman law was framed with exceptional precision and enforced to the letter. The judges, especially the *Prætors* (next to the Consuls in the 'course of honours'), made gradual and timely modifications in the growing body of the law, but Roman juries had no sympathy with the Athenian practice of appealing against the law to the higher court of reason. In comparison with the laws of most peoples, primitive or civilized, Roman law is remarkable for its emphasis on the absolute right of property, including in earlier times the freeman's absolute ownership of his slave, his child and his wife (which did not, however, prevent women from enjoying a more dignified social status in Rome than in Classical Greece). The Roman state demanded a great deal from its citizens, but there were clearly defined limits to its powers of interfering in their private affairs.

This massive social structure had need of all its solidity to withstand the blows that were to shake it in the 3rd Century—the hardest that ever assailed it from without. After the conquest of Italy the Roman legions were already the strongest military power in the Mediterranean world. But they could not extend their conquests outside the Peninsula till they had reckoned with the sea-power of Carthage. The siege of Syracuse, which we have chosen as our point of vantage for viewing the Mediterranean scene, was an episode in the struggle between the Romans and the Punic (or Phœnician) people of Carthage,

When from all sides poured in the Punic hosts  
And all things, dizzied by the shock of war,  
Shuddered and reeled beneath the ethereal vault,  
And none might tell to these or those would fall  
The empire of mankind by land and sea.

(Lucretius, iii, 833-837.)

The conflict was fought out in three wars over the period 264-146 B.C. The Second Punic War (218-201), in which the audacious genius of Hannibal was matched with the stubborn persistence of the Roman people, has caught the imagination of historians as a decisive phase of the conflict between East and West, or between Semite and Aryan. But we must not exaggerate the issues

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Strabo v, 3 (8): 'While the Greeks were reputed most successful in founding cities because they aimed at a strong site with good harbours and fruitful soil, the Romans provided most carefully for what the Greeks neglected, namely paved roads, aqueducts and sewers.'



at stake. It is a fair assumption that, whichever side had won, Mediterranean civilization would have remained in a wide sense Hellenistic. Before the destruction of their city, the Carthaginians had displayed fully as much aptitude for Hellenism as the Romans. They had more freely used and copied the work of Greek artists; the outward aspect of their towns was more Greek-like; and more than one of them had won a place in the roll of Greek philosophers. Owing to the wider linguistic gulf, however, they could scarcely have created a literature so closely based on Greek models as the Latin literature of the succeeding centuries, and in other respects too they would probably have been less faithful preservers of the Hellenic heritage. By training, and presumably also by temperament, they were more excitable and less disciplined than the Romans. Their violent religious emotion, which found vent in wholesale human sacrifice to Moloch, was more temperately expressed under Roman rule by a series of African writers, pagan and Christian. The crowded emporia and large slave-worked estates that composed the Carthaginian domain along the African coast did not breed fighting men to match the yeoman farmers of Italy. We can see that Hannibal owed much of his military success to his recruitment of Spaniards and Gauls and malcontent Italians, as indeed the Romans did later to their alliance with the rebellious Numidian (*i.e.* Nomad) subjects of Carthage. But we can form no picture, on our meagre evidence, of what Carthaginian civilization might have become, or even of what it was. Carthage stands without a 'witness at the bar of time'.

The constitution of Carthage had much in common with that of Rome, including the concentration of executive power in the hands of two annually elected magistrates (called by the same title—*shophet*—as the 'judges' of Israel). It was the only Barbarian constitution to receive favourable notice from Aristotle.

'The Carthaginians seem to have a good constitution, resembling those of Sparta and Crete. A proof that it is well ordered is the willingness of the people to abide by its ordering, and the fact that it has never known a civil war worth mentioning nor yet a tyrant. The common meals of the Fellowships at Carthage are comparable to the Spartan *phiditia*; the [Judicial] Council of 104 to the *Ephors* (certainly not inferior, for its members are chosen by merit and not by chance); and the 'Kings' [*i.e.* the *shophetim*] and Senate to their Spartan counterparts, with the advantage that the 'Kings' are elective and not hereditary. . . . The constitution inclines from aristocracy towards oligarchy, in that the masses think they ought to elect their rulers with an eye to wealth as well as merit, since a poor man cannot rule well or have leisure from his private affairs . . . This is a mistake of the law-giver, who should rather have seen to it that the best had the leisure to rule. If the elector must look to wealth for the sake of leisure, this has the bad result that the highest offices are obtainable by purchase; for the law makes wealth more honourable than merit and breeds a nation of money-grubbers.' (*Politics*, ii, 1272-1273.)

Aristotle's verdict is illuminated by the comment of Polybius, two centuries later.

'The Carthaginian constitution seems to me to have been at the outset well designed, the powers of the 'Kings', Senate and people being well balanced, as at Rome and Sparta. But at the time of the Hannibalic War it had entered on that natural process of decay which attacks every body or state or institution, while the Roman constitution, having developed later, was still in its prime. At Carthage the masses had already acquired the decisive voice, whereas at Rome it still rested with the best element as represented by the Senate. . . .



[British Museum 1101 21/1]

ROMAN WEDDING



CICERO



AUGUSTUS

[Ancora]

'Their chief weakness is that they use foreign and mercenary troops, while the Romans rely on citizen armies sprung from their own soil. . . . By nature the Italians surpass the Phoenicians and Africans in strength of body and boldness of spirit, and by their institutions they do everything to stimulate this temper in the young. . . . Again, the Carthaginians think nothing dishonourable if it is conducive to profit, whereas at Rome nothing is more shameful than the acceptance of bribes or the pursuit of gain by disreputable means.' (vi, 51-56 [condensed].)

Polybius suggests many other reasons for the victory of the Romans in this as in other wars. In his description of their military organization, for instance, he notes their readiness to abandon customary tactics and equipment when they find anything better, as they were quick to adopt the Greek pattern of spears and shields and to copy the Carthaginian war galley, with the original innovation of a gang-plank for boarding. On the whole, however, they preferred discipline and routine to the too experimental methods of the Greeks. To save themselves the hard work of fortifying a camp in open ground, the Greeks would exercise their ingenuity in choosing a strong site and modifying the lay-out of their camp accordingly. The Romans everywhere made camp on the same orderly plan, so that every soldier knew exactly where to find his own tent or that of any particular officer. But, more than anything else, Polybius attributes the success of the Romans to an ingredient of their culture which we have yet to consider.

'The greatest virtue of the Roman constitution, in my judgement, is its attitude towards the gods; and what holds Roman society together is the very thing of which others are most contemptuous—superstition. Many are surprised to find this gorgeously dramatized and introduced into both private and public life in a way that defies exaggeration. In my view, this has been done deliberately for the sake of the masses. In a commonwealth of sages there might be no place for such practices; but, since the masses are everywhere fickle and full of lawless desires, irrational impulses and violent temper, they can be held together only by the unseen terrors and ceremonial splendour of religion. Therefore, I believe, it was not at haphazard that the Ancients instilled into the masses the notion of god and tales of Hades; rather it is the men of our day who are heedless fools to banish these beliefs. So it is that, whereas among the Greeks, to take only one example, if public men are entrusted with so much as a talent under the safeguard of ten recorders and as many seals and twice as many witnesses, they cannot keep their trust. The Romans, when they handle great sums in office or on embassies, are faithful to their trust on the mere pledge of an oath. Elsewhere it is seldom that a man handles public funds and keeps his hands clean; among the Romans it is seldom that one is found guilty of such practices.' (Polybius, vi, 56.)

### *The Religious Background*

We have taken a typical Roman citizen, of the days when the might of Rome first dawned portentously upon the civilized world, and are trying to imagine what it meant to him that he was a Roman. Rome in the geographical sense—that cluster of white-washed wattle-and-daub huts with a few stone temples, straggling over the Seven Hills and ringed round (since after the Gaulish disaster) with a high stone wall—this Rome was merely the market where he had gone in peaceful seasons to barter his corn and olive oil for ploughs and yokes and earthenware and an occasional luxury article from the East; to gossip in the wine-shop about the cost of living and the deterioration of the climate (a phenomenon which

Lucretius notes as often remarked upon by the farmers of his day); perhaps to record his vote in the elective Assembly or the legislative Council of the Plebs, though not with the keenness of the more politically minded Greek. The Rome for which he fought was an abstraction—a set of hard-won rights, disciplined habits and ingrained loyalties, fortified by traditions (true or false) of selfless patriots in 'the brave days of old' and summed up in a few familiar phrases—'Senate and People', 'the custom of our ancestors', and (most potent of all) 'the peace of the gods'.

At Rome, as in Greece, the raw material of the official religion was apparently a vague conception, inherited from the Aryan nomads, of a 'Sky Father' (*Diespiter*, *Jupiter*, *Jove*), grafted upon the magical rites that had attended the practice of agriculture ever since its first beginnings near the eastern end of the Mediterranean. But there had been no Roman Homer or Hesiod to 'make the generations of the gods'. Roman religion had been systematized not by poets but by statesmen, among whom tradition assigned the leading role to king Numa Pompilius (roughly contemporary with Hesiod and the earlier Hebrew prophets). While they elaborated and manipulated the machinery of omens and oracles and processional displays of images in what they conceived to be the interests of the state (or, in Marxist language, as 'opium for the people'), Roman statesmen felt no sense of sacrilegiously abusing a sacred truth. Like the practical men they were, they looked on the state religion, as well as the household and clan religions from which it had grown, as something to be used: and this was its proper use. Incurious about the beings they worshipped, as about other natural phenomena, they wove few stories round them, so that there is little trace of any genuinely Roman mythology. Suspecting all emotional excess as unmanly, they strove to exclude from Rome the missionaries of foreign cults who beguiled the populace with more exciting emotions than those inspired by the stately ceremonial of the official worship. A Roman prayer was about as much a spiritual experience as applying for a rebate of income tax: the essential thing was to make sure that the petition was presented in due form to the competent authority.

In the vagueness of their creed and the carefully guarded precision of their ritual, the Romans preserved, more perhaps than any other civilized people, the features we associate with 'primitive' religion. Though some of their deities, such as the Aryan *Jupiter* and the Mediterranean harvest goddess *Ceres*, were early conceived in personal form and came more and more to be identified with the clear-cut personalities of Greek mythology, the typical object of Roman worship was a *numen*, a mysterious uncanny something not unlike the *mana* of savage thought. Especially characteristic were the indefinite collective deities—the *Lares* of the homestead and its fields, the *Penates* of the store-cupboard, the *Manes* ('Good Spirits') of the dead. Others appear to have been occasional deities, endowed with a name purely to meet some specific contingency. So, for instance, the priesthood known as the 'Brethren of the Ploughlands', when entrusted with the delicate task of removing a lightning-blasted fig tree from a sacred grove, after making suitable sacrifices to all the deities, personal or collective, who might conceivably be offended at the proceeding, concluded by sacrificing a pair of ewes to four goddesses, otherwise unknown, whose titles denote that they were interested in Setting Ablaze, Hewing Down, Chopping Up and Carrying Away—equivalent apparently to the cautious legal phrase 'whomsoever else it may concern'. Here surely were men whose world was alive with forces they did not know and did not wish to know but were determined at all costs not to offend.

Such was indeed the frame of mind in which the Roman peasant went about his seasonal tasks, every one of which had its appropriate sacrifice and prayer. On clearing a thicket, for instance, he would pray:

'Be thou god or goddess unto whom this is sacred [or should we say 'taboo'?), as it is due to thee to make expiation by reason of the cutting back of this sacred thing and by reason hereof, whether I do it or another at my bidding, that it may be rightly done, by reason thereof I in sacrificing this pig for an expiation pray good prayers that thou be of good will and inclination towards me, my house and my household, bond and free; by reason hereof be thou appeased by the sacrifice of this pig for an expiation.' (Cato: *On Husbandry*, 139.)

In precisely the same spirit, by a like meticulous observance of prescribed formulae on normal occasions and attention to portents that might be warnings of something abnormal, the rulers of Rome endeavoured to keep on friendly terms with the powers that be—to keep unbroken by any breach of contract on their part the 'peace of the gods' on which the national prosperity was believed to depend. Many of the accepted formulae seem to preserve the customs of a remote and savage past, as for instance when the duly appointed 'father' of the Roman people solemnized a treaty by praying to *Diespiter* to smite them, if they broke their faith, even as he (the speaker) smote this pig, which he thereupon sacrificed with a flint knife.<sup>1</sup>

On this foundation of primitive nature-magic the Etruscan conquerors piled a fantastic edifice of Oriental pseudo-science in which every kind of natural phenomenon became a means of divining the will of supernatural powers. The Republican Senators guided the growth of the state religion with great care, admitting alien immortals to their pantheon by the same process of gradual naturalization which they used in admitting alien mortals to citizenship. One of their favourite devices, which probably had great propaganda value, was to provide a temple and priesthood in Rome for the divine patron of any people with whom they found themselves at war. When a foreign cult became popular with the masses, the Senators either adopted and regulated it (as they did with the worship of the Phrygian 'Great Mother', introduced in 204 B.C. to counteract the depressing effect of the Hannibalic campaigns) or else forcibly expelled it (as they went to great trouble in 185 B.C. to suppress the riotous and subversive Bacchanalia in honour of Dionysus). Similarly, while they banished the first missionaries of Epicureanism (173 B.C.), they gave a guarded welcome to the Stoics, whose ideal was not incompatible with the aristocratic Roman virtues of 'manliness' (*virtus*) and 'poise' (*gravitas*). The wholesale adoption of Greek mythology by Latin poets from the 2nd Century onwards, while it was primarily an act of literary discipleship, also had a humanizing effect on Roman religious ideas.

In the 2nd Century, as Polybius found, Roman 'superstition' was still a potent moral force. A century later, when educated Romans had been made free of the sceptical sophisticated realm of Hellenistic thought, the ancestral faith was losing its hold. Unofficially, the more thoughtful acknowledged that the true nature of the gods was not to be found in 'political religion' any more than in 'poetical religion', but only in 'philosophic religion' (*i.e.* some brand of Stoicism). But, like Polybius, they dreaded the consequences if public worship fell into neglect in a republic that was far from being a 'commonwealth of sages'. And, after all, 'Jupiter Best and Greatest', whose temple on the Capitol was the centre of the state religion, had a better claim than the Zeus of Homer to be a manifestation of the 'true' Zeus of Cleanthes and Chrysippus. For had not his power, his *numen*, been unmistakably manifested in the long sequence of Roman triumphs?

In Cicero's dialogues we are introduced to a circle of cultured gentlemen

<sup>1</sup> Livy 1, 24. (Cf. 1, 32—declaration of war by throwing a wooden-pointed spear into enemy territory.)

reasoning with fairly open minds concerning the nature of the soul and of the gods—'what is to be thought about religion, piety, holiness, ceremonies, faith, oaths, temples, hallowed shrines and sacrifices and auspices'.<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology they have no faith whatever. To an Epicurean, who bluntly attacks it, another speaker replies not with a defence but with a counter-attack which reveals the scepticism of his own class (though he probably underrates the credulity of the ignorant):

'Where is there an old wife so silly as to fear those horrors from which we are supposed to be delivered by the teachings of science?—those

High halls of Acheron, pallid haunts of Death,  
Shrouded in gloom.'

(*Talks at Tusculum*, i, 48.)

This scepticism, however, was not unlimited. If Cicero and his friends did not commonly turn to religion as a source of personal strength and joy, many of them evidently found in it a welcome assurance that the affairs of men had an important place in the scheme of things. In the conduct of daily life they were still guided, though less than their forbears, by 'religion' in the Roman sense of 'attentiveness to supernatural admonitions'.<sup>2</sup> 'Formerly,' says Cicero (*On Divination*, i, 28), 'scarcely any important business, even of a private nature, was undertaken without consulting the auspices', i.e. omens divined from the flight of birds. He points out, however, that divination does not prove the existence of a god; it might be defended as an empirical science, like medicine or navigation. And the very vehemence with which he defends this ancient and salutary art may suggest that in his heart of hearts he sympathized with that celebrated *Augur* (a magistrate charged with taking public auspices) who wondered how one *Augur* could meet another and keep his face straight. Yet Cicero himself was proud to be elected an *Augur*, and officially upheld augury as an integral part of the state religion and one of the pillars of the constitution. The following declaration of his official views, with due allowance for forensic eyewash and the platform manner, represents at least what an intelligent Roman patriot might be expected to believe; and some of its phrases have a ring of sincerity that may not be due entirely to the pleader's art:

'Though I may be supposed to have devoted myself more than most men of affairs to literary pursuits, I am not one to take especial delight in that class of literature which deters and beguiles our minds from religion (*religio*). In the first place, my authorities and preceptors for religious observance are our ancestors, whose wisdom seems to me so great that a man might be credited with prudence enough and to spare if he could come near enough to their prudence—I will not say to match it, but even to see how great it was. Our ancestors held that provision was made for established and hallowed ceremonies by the Pontifical office, for an assurance of success by augury, for the expiation of portents by the lore of the Etruscans. . . . Furthermore, in such spare time as came my way, I have noted what wise and learned men [*i.e.* Greek philosophers] have said and written about the divinity (*numen*) of the immortal gods; which doctrines, inspired though they be, are yet such that they seem to have been learnt from our ancestors

<sup>1</sup> *On the Nature of the Gods*, i, 14. Cicero himself, who professes to be a Platonist, claims to speak 'with a free judgement, not bound to support any opinion willy nilly' (*Ib.* i, 17).

<sup>2</sup> Cicero is no doubt correct in deriving the word *religio* from *religere*, 'to pay attention' (the opposite of *negligere*), as against later theologians who connected it with *reigare*, 'to bind'. It is thus not far removed from sense from *superstitio*, which meant something like 'standing awestruck' or perhaps 'standing outside oneself' (Greek *ecstasis*); the suggestion that its original meaning was 'a survival' credits the Romans with an historical attitude towards superstitions which is purely modern.

rather than by them. For who is so soulless that, when he looks up to the sky, he can doubt that there are gods, or imagine that those works, designed with such artifice that scarcely by any art can any man grasp the order and necessity of things, are the product of chance? Or who, perceiving that there are gods, can fail to perceive that it is by their will (*numen*) that this mighty empire of ours was created, enlarged and preserved? However highly we may esteem ourselves, we have not excelled the Spaniards in numbers, the Gauls in hardihood, the Carthaginians in subtlety, the Greeks in the arts, nor in the home-grown mother-wit of this race and country our fellow Italians and Latins. But in piety and religion and in this sole wisdom, that we have perceived that all things are ruled and guided by the will of the gods—herein we have surpassed all races and all peoples.' (*On the Response of the Entrail-diviners*, 9.)

If we deduct from this confession of faith the generous contribution made by Greek philosophy, we get down to the simple creed of the plain Roman citizen: every act, from cutting back a tree to destroying an empire, is attended by unseen dangers; our ancestors claimed to know the procedure by which these dangers could be countered; and all history is witness that they were right.

### *Imperialism and Class-War*

After this digression we may find it easier to understand why the city of Archimedes fell a prey to the Savage Conqueror. Ten years later (201 B.C.) the Romans had defeated Hannibal and imposed a crippling peace on Carthage. They had nothing more to fear from any foreign power, except possibly the Keltic and Germanic hordes beyond the Alps. Yet for the next 55 years they were engaged in almost continuous wars, as nakedly aggressive as any ever inspired by the megalomania of a monarch. It seemed as if the Roman republic, like the ancient monarchies, was rapidly expanding to bursting-point, urged on by the competing needs and greeds of the various classes which together determined its policy.

If the Hellenistic states of the East had presented a united front, they could doubtless have withstood this onslaught. They were greatly superior in numbers and material resources and, as the defenders, they enjoyed a definite strategic advantage even against the highly evolved siege methods of the time. As it was, the Romans followed the maxim 'Divide and rule'. They played off the Aetolian against the Achaian League. They ceremoniously 'liberated' the Greek cities (196 B.C.) as a stroke against Macedoniz. They used the arms of Eumenes king of Pergamum to defeat his Seleucid rival Antiochus IV (189 B.C.). They defended Greek culture against the Barbarians, and Jewish nationalism against the Greeks. In 146 B.C. a Roman army under Mummius sacked Corinth, stronghold of the last struggle for independence in Greece. In the same year another Roman army under Scipio (the Younger) sacked Carthage, which had shown alarming powers of recuperation from its former overthrow.

Mummius was a fair sample of the Savage Conqueror: his soldiers were seen by Polybius tearing down masterpieces of the painter's art to use as draught-boards, and the general's reaction to this vandalism was to order that any work of art destroyed must be replaced by one of equal value. But Scipio had drunk of the disturbing waters of Greek philosophy. As he stood watching the burning city, the thought came into his mind that even Rome was not immortal; and he murmured a line from the Iliad:

'The day will be when holy Troy shall fall.'

When Scipio was elected *Censor*,<sup>1</sup> he modified the customary prayer that the

<sup>1</sup> The *Censors* were two senior magistrates, elected once in five years to revise the list of Senators and exercise a general supervision over public morals.



Roman dominion might be enlarged and prayed instead that it might be preserved. And indeed, though it took another century to round off Rome's domination of the Mediterranean coastlands (completed by the conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C.) and a few outlying provinces were added later still, the era of continuous expansion was over. The conquerors of the world were now faced with the task of governing it. And Scipio, as he surveyed the ranks of his contemporaries, may well have wondered what sort of a job they would make of it.

His friend Polybius, at any rate, was not encouraging. In praising Scipio's generosity, he remarks that 'It is quite unheard of at Rome for anyone voluntarily to give any of his belongings to anybody'. But, while the Roman conquerors remained as hard and grasping as the meanest peasant, the sudden acquisition of relatively enormous wealth had made short work of the traditional Roman virtues. Rome had become a city where 'paramours fetched a better price than ploughlands and pots of pickled fish than ploughmen'. All the symptoms were present of that late stage in the natural history of a body politic when growth gives place to decay.

'When a state has struggled through great dangers to undisputed mastery, the obvious effect of the influx of prosperity will be to raise the standard of living and to make men unduly contentious in competing for office and other emoluments. . . . The masses, excited by fancied wrongs and the flattery of place-hunters, will be guided only by their passions and refuse to obey the ruling class. So the state will come to assume the fairest of names, freedom and democracy, but the worst of realities, mob-rule (*ochlocracy*).' (Polybius, vi, 57; cf. xxxi, 25-26.)

These gloomy prophecies were so far fulfilled that the last century of the Roman Republic, from the Tribuneship of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 to the defeat of Mark Antony at Actium in 31, was an age of violence and bloodshed. The question at issue was not whether Rome should rule the Mediterranean world—that was scarcely disputed—but who should rule Rome. At the first glance it may seem that the question was decided by the talents and fortune of a handful of adventurers, gambling recklessly for power. But each of these diverse personalities owed his power to successful leadership of one or more of the antagonistic classes in which the population of the Roman world was now aligned. It is in the competing aims of these classes, more sharply differentiated perhaps than any other class distinctions in recorded history, that we find the real clue to the events of this tempestuous century.

### (i) *The Ruling Class*

The statesmen and generals who steered the Roman Republic through the storms of the Hannibalic War and forward on the floodtide of conquest were mostly drawn, as we have seen, from an exclusive clique of families, closely linked by ties of marriage and by their common interests as land-owners. While members of this class accepted advancement in the 'course of honours' as a duty and a right, they had also to buttress their hereditary claim to office by direct or indirect bribery of the electors and by skilful manipulation of an electoral system so designed that its democratic principles could not easily be translated into practice. Those who won their way to the Praetorship, or eventually to the Consulship, shared with their colleagues during their year of office supreme executive and military powers. If their sphere of duty (*provincia*) lay overseas, it might be necessary to prolong their term of office. In course of time the conquered territories outside Italy were divided into 'provinces', which these ex-magistrates administered, normally for periods of three years, as representatives of the Roman

People, with the title of Pro-praetor or Pro-consul. Collectively the same men wielded a more lasting authority as Senators. The *Censors* possessed, but seldom exercised, the power to enrol in the Senate men who had not held one of the higher magistracies. There was also a property qualification, which confined Senatorial rank to the wealthiest families. Their wealth could only be in land, since (by a law of which, as a body, they must have approved) they were forbidden to engage in business.

'It was forbidden for any Senator or Senator's son to own a ship of more than 2,000 gallons capacity, which would suffice to carry the produce of his fields. Any gainful occupation was unbecoming to the Fathers of the State.' (Livy: xxi, 63.)

Cicero somewhat qualifies this last assertion:

'Commerce on a small scale must be accounted ungentlemanly; on a large scale it is not wholly contemptible. . . . But of all sources of profit none is better than agriculture, none more agreeable, none more generous, none worthier of a free man.' (*Duties*, i, 151.)

Besides the gentlemanly pursuit of land-owning, the ruling class mainly relied for the acquisition of wealth on the opportunities afforded by successful campaigns and provincial governorships. In his first year, it was said, a governor who knew the ropes could recover his election expenses. The proceeds of his second year would appease the judges before whom he might have to stand trial for extortion. The third year was clear profit.

Under this system many private citizens enjoyed a degree of wealth (*i.e.* legal power to command the service of others) that had hitherto been attained only by sovereigns charged with the government of large kingdoms. Like other privileged classes, they preserved their self-respect by disguising from themselves the foundations of their exalted position. Nor did they all at once abandon their traditional prudence and public spirit. But, as rulers of luxurious Hellenistic realms, they were exposed to great temptations for which, like the Spartans, they were ill prepared.

'When the strain of war was relaxed, the younger generation turned to dissipation and indulgence, making wealth a minister to desire. Throughout the city thrift became less esteemed than extravagance, military exercise than idleness. The idol of the hour was not the man ennobled by heroic deeds, but the one who devoted his whole life to the most delectable enjoyments.' (Diodorus, xxxvi, under the year 99 B.C.)

On the whole, the bodily and mental vigour with which the nobles enjoyed their monetary power is more surprising than their lack of any real sense of its enormous responsibilities. Not many accepted the blessings of a higher civilization in the liberal and temperate spirit of Scipio. The more conservative resisted any advance of civilization as destructive of those 'ancestral customs' to which Rome owed her greatness. For this reason the first great spokesman of this group, Marcus Porcius Cato, was opposed to imperial expansion, though clamorous for the destruction of any power which seemed, like Carthage, to be a serious rival.

'Cato owed much of his power to his command of language, which earned him the title of the Roman Demosthenes; but his way of life won him even more renown. For declamation was a game at which many young men were already competing; but his endurance of old-fashioned toil, his frugal dinners

and uncooked lunches, his plain attire and unpretentious residence, his thinking it finer to do without luxuries than to possess them—all this was rare. For already the greatness of the Republic was corrupting its integrity, and from lordship over many things and people it was becoming adulterated with many foreign customs and admitting examples of the most diverse ways of life. No wonder men admired Cato, when they saw others fatigued by toil and enervated by pleasure, whereas he remained unconquered by either, not only while he was young and ambitious but when crowned with grey hairs, a Consulship and a triumph, like an athlete who keeps in training after his victory. . . . He bought only cheap slaves, not wanting beauties but sturdy grooms and cow-hands, and, when these had grown too old to be serviceable, he thought it right to sell them. . . . Some men put these habits down to stinginess; others applauded his excessive self-discipline as a salutary lesson to the rest. For my part, I think his selling off worn-out slaves like beasts of burden shows an unduly harsh nature . . . I would not dispose of a hard-working ox because it was old, much less banish a man from his familiar surroundings, like an exile from his fatherland, for the sake of a handful of coppers—for he could be of no more value to the purchaser than to the vendor.' (Plutarch: *Life of Cato the Elder*, 4-5.)<sup>1</sup>

Election to the Censorship in 184 B.C. gave the old Puritan his opportunity. He strove manfully to 'hack off the Hydra heads of luxury and effeminacy' by imposing a crushing supertax on 'clothing, conveyances, women's ornaments and household effects', but with no more permanent success than has always attended such sumptuary legislation.

Cato believed that the Roman character was being undermined not only by the luxuries of the Hellenistic world but by its culture. He urged that all Greek philosophers should be banished from Rome, 'lest the young men who flocked to them should covet glory rather as orators than as men of action and soldiers'. He described Socrates as 'a chatterer and a disturber of the peace', and 'with the dogmatism of old age he asserted in prophetic strain that the Romans would be ruined by stuffing themselves with Greek literature'—a prophecy which Plutarch (c. A.D. 100) notes as having been falsified, though it is arguable that Cato was the more far-sighted of the two. Yet even Cato in his old age was constrained to contaminate himself with the evil thing, and acknowledged his debt to Demosthenes and Thucydides.

The futility of Cato's efforts is illustrated by Plutarch's companion picture of Lucullus, who fought several brilliant campaigns in Asia in 74-66 B.C.

'The story of Lucullus reads like a piece of the Old Comedy, the earlier scenes all politics and strategy, the later all feasting and merry-making, not to say revel routs and festive lights and frivolity. For this is the word I at any rate should apply to his sumptuous buildings and baths and pleasures, still more to his collections of pictures and statues and the like, on which he lavished such pains and poured out in a flood the wealth he had amassed in his campaigns. Even in our day, with our far higher standard of luxury, the Lucullan gardens are classed among the Emperor's costliest. His up-country villa at Tusculum, with its vistas, its loggias and its terraces, provoked the comment from Pompey that it was well designed for summer but uninhabitable in winter. "Do you think," said Lucullus with a laugh, "that I have so much less sense, than cranes and storks that I do not change my residence with the seasons?" . . .

<sup>1</sup> Cato's extant treatise *On Husbandry* (ii, 7) contains the injunction to 'sell off worn-out or blemished cattle or sheep, an old cart, old tools, an aged or sickly slave, or anything else that may be superfluous'.

'His daily dinner betrayed the *nouveau riche*, not only by the purple draperies and crystal goblets, the cabaret shows and vocal entertainments, but by the lavish excess of dainties and condiments, which roused the envy of vulgar minds. . . .

'It is clear that Lucullus himself not only enjoyed this style of life but was proud of it. It is said that he offered his hospitality for several days to certain Greeks who were visiting Rome. When, like true Greeks, they felt ashamed at the huge daily expense being incurred on their behalf and declined the invitation, Lucullus said with a smile: "Part of this is spent on your account, no doubt, gentlemen, but most of it on account of Lucullus." . . . On such objects he used his wealth in high-handed fashion, as though it were in truth a captive and a Barbarian.

'More worthy of record and respect was his expenditure on books; for he collected a large number beautifully written. And the use he made of them did him still more credit. For his libraries were open to all, and the adjoining grounds and studies freely admitted Greek visitors, as to a sanctuary of the Muses, where they could come and pass the time together in joyful escape from their other cares. Often he would stroll round the grounds and join in the discussions of the learned and lend his aid in political matters when requested. In short, his house was a hearth and a council-chamber to Greeks visiting Rome. He welcomed all schools of philosophy and was well disposed to all, though his special love and enthusiasm was for the older doctrines of the *Academy*.' (*Life of Lucullus*, 39-42.)

Though Plutarch may condemn his 'frivolity', Lucullus compares favourably with others of Rome's new rich, men whose appreciation of Greek culture was limited (as Cicero remarks of his adversary Piso) to just so much Epicureanism as seemed to justify irresponsible self-indulgence. Lucullus could also claim that his riches were legitimate spoils of war. It was not so easy to justify the wealth amassed by magistrates who were sent out not to conquer but to administer. The conduct of Lucullus' contemporary Gaius Verres, governor of Sicily in 73-71 B.C., was exceptional not so much by its flagrancy as by the political circumstances that made it possible to condemn the perpetrator.

'While Verres was governor, the Sicilians enjoyed neither their own laws nor the resolutions of our Senate nor the common rights of mankind. . . . For three years no case was judged but at his pleasure; no land was held by such ancestral title but the holder might be ousted by his judgement. Countless sums were extorted from tenants of the public lands by a new and iniquitous decree. Loyal allies were classed as enemies; Roman citizens tortured and executed like slaves; the guilty acquitted by bribery, the innocent accused in absence, condemned and banished without trial; well fortified harbours and well protected cities exposed to pirates and brigands; Sicilian soldiers and sailors, our allies and friends, allowed to starve; well appointed and well posted fleets, to the deep disgrace of the Roman people, thrown away and destroyed. Ancient monuments, set up by wealthy kings to adorn their cities or presented or restored to Sicilian communities by our victorious generals—these our precious governor stripped and despoiled. And, not satisfied with public statues and ornaments, he plundered temples sacred to the holiest rites and left the Sicilians not one god who struck him as displaying ancient or artistic workmanship. From recounting some of his acts I am deterred by shame and by reluctance to rekindle the grief of those who could not guard their wives and children from his lust.' (Cicero: *Against Verres*, I, 4 (13-14).)

In support of these charges, Cicero adduces at least enough evidence to warrant his lament on the decay of public virtue and his picture of delegates from Greece and Asia beholding in the treasures of Verres the impending ruin of their countries.

The worst offenders might be condemned by public opinion, or occasionally even by a jury; but wealth was a necessary means to political power, and ambitious men must acquire it somehow—if not in a province, then in Rome itself. They profited by the lack of what we should call essential public services and still more, in the last years of the Republic, by the confiscations attendant on the civil wars. Plutarch gives a lively picture of the methods that enabled Crassus, consul in 72 B.C., to increase his already considerable fortune by more than 2,000 per cent.

'Most of this, to tell the brutal truth, he reaped from fire and war turning public calamities to private profit. For, when the property of civil war victims was put up to auction as "spoils of war", he never declined to bid or to accept. Moreover, noting those twin plagues of Rome, conflagration and collapse of buildings due to topheaviness and overcrowding<sup>1</sup>, he bought over 500 slaves trained as architects and builders. With these to help him, he used to buy up buildings that had caught fire, or the neighbouring buildings, which the owners in their terror and bewilderment were willing to sell very cheap. By this means he got possession of a great part of Rome. With all these experts at command, he built nothing himself except his own house; indeed, he used to declare that men with a passion for building ruined themselves without other enemies. Though he owned many profitable silver-mines and ploughlands with their workers, these were as nothing to his domestic slaves. He possessed a great multitude of readers, secretaries, money-testers, housekeepers and waiters, whose training he had personally superintended, maintaining that a master's main task is the supervision of his slaves, the living tools of his economic activities. . . .

'With all this, Crassus made a great display of hospitality. He kept open house and used to lend money to his friends interest-free; but, by insisting on full and prompt repayment of the principal, he incurred more odium than if he had demanded heavy interest. His choice of guests was by no means exclusive. His frugal banquets were marked by a simplicity and informality more pleasing than riotous expense. He cultivated the art of speech, especially that of swaying multitudes. . . . He is said also to have had a wide knowledge of history and a smattering of philosophy, inclining towards the doctrines of Aristotle.'<sup>2</sup> (*Life of Crassus*, 2-3.)

It was of men like Crassus that Sallust was thinking when he described Roman houses as resembling cities. We may picture them as conforming more or less to the ideal held up by a contemporary writer on architecture:

'For noblemen who in the exercise of offices and magistracies have obligations to discharge to the citizens, there must be made royal fore-courts, lofty halls, spacious colonnades, groves, and broad walks in a style appropriate to their dignity, besides libraries, picture galleries and court-rooms no less imposing than those in public buildings, because their houses must often be the scenes of public assemblies or private hearings and judgements.' (Vitruvius: *On Architecture*, VI, v, 2.)

Though the civil wars did not break out openly till 88 B.C., they had their roots in the false security and the scramble for wealth that followed the age of

<sup>1</sup> Strabo's description of Rome, v, 3 (7), refers to 'continual collapses, conflagrations and sales'.

<sup>2</sup> It was from Aristotle that he got the expression 'living tools'.

conquest. More and more (in Polybius' words) Roman statesmen became 'contentious in competing for office and other emoluments'. Because neither the state nor their own class was in any obvious danger, they felt they could safely abandon the old standards of public service and mutual support. They entered politics not so much to influence public policy as to take part in an exciting game of canvassing, lobbying and litigation, which offered glittering prizes to the best players. In the words of a contemporary poet:

To one sole study each devotes his life,  
 'The craft of artful speech and guileful strife,  
 To vie in flattery, sport a virtuous show,  
 All spreading snares, as each to each were foe.  
 (Lucilius: *Satires*, i.)

This was a dangerous game for a privileged class whose power rested on such shaky foundations. In fact the need for wise statesmanship had never been greater, though the enemies that threatened the state were less visible than Hannibal. Victory abroad had precipitated an economic crisis in Italy, on such a scale that for once our ancient authorities, usually so blind to economic factors, have clearly grasped its significance.

'As the Romans subdued Italy bit by bit, they used to set aside part of the land and establish towns on it, or else choose some of their own citizens to occupy it as colonists. These were to act as garrisons. The conquered land itself, as it came into their possession, they would parcel out, if it was under cultivation, to individual settlers, or else sell or lease it. Such part as was then lying waste owing to the war, which was also the most plentiful, since they could not yet spare the time to allot it, they would offer to any who would cultivate it on payment of a portion of the yearly produce—a tithe of grain or a fifth of fruit.<sup>1</sup> To some again they granted rights of pasturage on payment of a portion of their flocks and herds. This they did in order to multiply the Italian breed, whom they found most industrious, so that they might have allies of their own kin. But what actually happened was just the opposite. For the rich, having got possession of most of this unallotted land and gaining confidence with the passage of time that no one would ever claim it back, appropriated by purchase or force the small holdings of the poor, especially those adjoining their own. Having thus acquired huge tracts of land, they employed slaves as cultivators and herdsmen, because free labourers were liable to be called away on military service, whereas slaves, being exempt, worked and bred continuously to the great profit of their owners. Thus the ruling class became exceedingly rich and slaves multiplied throughout the land, while the Italians, oppressed by poverty, taxation and military service, became ever fewer and less prolific. If they had rest from campaigning, they were reduced to unemployment, the land being in the hands of the rich and tilled by slaves instead of freemen.' (Appian: *Civil War*, i, 7.)

Actually, the amount of public land which any individual could hold was limited by law to 300 acres, and the poorer citizens were legally entitled to demand a reallocation. Moreover, the common people were constitutionally supreme, both as electors and as legislators. But the first man to draw effective attention to these facts was a young aristocrat, Tiberius Gracchus, who had been reared in the enlightened circle of his brother-in-law Scipio and had taken more seriously than his fellow pupils the idealistic doctrines of his Stoic preceptor. On his

<sup>1</sup> I.e. vine and olive, which were already beginning to replace wheat as the staple crop of Italy.

return from a Spanish campaign, he was horrified during the march through Etruria to see 'the desolation of the countryside, and the husbandmen and herdsmen all outlandish and barbarian slaves'. In 133 B.C. Tiberius was Tribune of the Plebs and sought by reviving the ancient powers of that office and of the popular Assembly to carry through a sweeping agrarian reform. He proposed to finance his scheme of land settlement out of the immense revenues of the new province of 'Asia', the former kingdom of Pergamum, which its last ruler Attalus III was alleged to have bequeathed to the Roman people.

This scheme was a serious blow, the first for many years, to the privileges of the Senatorial clique. But the city mob was too ignorant and unstable to sustain a consistent policy, and Tiberius' Tribunician power expired at the end of a year. When (unconstitutionally) he sought re-election, his opponents organized a riot, proclaimed the state in danger, and put him and his principal associates to the sword. The ruling class had weathered the first storm, but without solving the economic problem or strengthening their prestige or even their legal status.

## (ii) *Big Business*

When (in 123 B.C.) Gaius Gracchus secured election to the Tribuneship and set himself to resume his brother's policy and avenge his death, his keener and less scrupulous mind perceived the need of some more effective ally than the city mob. He turned to the rising class of Roman citizens who, while not of Senatorial rank, were rich enough to serve, if called upon, in the cavalry—though in fact most of these so-called 'Equestrians' or 'Knights' were unwarlike business men having no more connexion with horses than the chivalry of present-day Britain. Gaius bribed this class with a law that gave them a free hand in collecting the revenues of 'Asia'. He also succeeded in passing a law that, instead of provincial governors being tried for extortion by men of their own class, the jurors should be drawn from the Knights. With the support of this influential body, Gaius was able to put through a substantial programme of reform—reallotment of public land, cheap distribution of corn in Rome, colonization of Roman citizens in Italy and abroad, on the desolate site of Carthage. Before long he shared the fate of Tiberius, and much of his work was undone. But he had at least been successful in 'making the republic two-headed'. These powerful juries remained an apple of discord between Senators and Knights, even when the dispute had been settled (soon after the trial of Verres) by a compromise. Either way, the provincials were losers; for the Knights had their own methods of extortion, and were more likely to condemn an honest governor than one who let them share in the loot.

The large capitalists of this age were not captains of industry, for the most part not even merchants, but financiers pure and simple. Many were engaged in lending large sums to individuals or communities, often on the flimsiest security and at rates of interest far above the legal maximum of 12 per cent. Cicero speaks of the whole world being in debt, and his own correspondence shows that he was no exception to the rule. While private business was conducted in this reckless way, it is not surprising that public business was on the same hand-to-mouth basis. The Roman Republic had no civil service to administer the property it acquired or even to collect the tithes and other taxes it imposed on conquered peoples. Practically all public works and sources of revenue were farmed out to private contractors (*publicani*).

'Innumerable undertakings are farmed out by the Censors throughout Italy for the construction and maintenance of public works and for the exploitation of rivers, harbours, gardens, mines and arable land—in short, everything that falls within the domain of the Romans. All these are taken

up by the mass of the people, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that everyone is involved in the business and the resulting employment, including the contractors themselves, their partners and their guarantors. The Senate has the power, if the need arise, to grant the contractors an extension of time or to lighten the terms of a contract or even to cancel it outright.' (Polybius, vi, 17.)

In difficult times, many who sank their capital in such undertakings went bankrupt. But the triumphs of Roman arms brought the possibility of enormous profits to the speculator. The conquered provinces swarmed with 'publicans', organized in syndicates for mutual insurance, and the leading men of Rome were enriched by their activities. Often the provincial governors had a direct interest in these enterprises, and those members of their staffs who were concerned with financial administration were generally men of 'Knighly' rank, hand in glove with their fellow financiers. The tax-farmers and their underlings whom Gaius Gracchus had let loose on 'Asia' soon made themselves so well hated that, when the province was invaded (in 88 B.C.) by the Barbarian king Mithradates of Pontus, the civil population rose in revolt and massacred many thousands of them. This is alluded to by Cicero in a revealing passage.

'In the first place, capital has been sunk in this province by publicans, honourable and respected men whose property ought to be an object of your care. For, if we have always acknowledged the taxes to be the sinews of the commonwealth, we shall be justified in saying that the class that administers them is the prop of all the rest. Furthermore, there are worthy and industrious men of other classes, some of whom are engaged in business in Asia and merit your consideration in their absence, while others have huge sums invested in the province. You owe it to your humanity to safeguard a large body of citizens from disaster. You owe it to your common sense to see that a disaster befalling many citizens cannot be dissociated from the common weal. There is little weight in the plea that you can afterwards recover by victory the taxes lost by the publicans; for they will be deprived of the ability to contract for them by their disaster, and others of the will to do so by fear. Besides, we ought not to forget the lesson taught us at the outbreak of the Asiatic War by this same province and the same Mithradates. For we know that then, when many lost fortunes in Asia, payment was suspended at Rome and credit collapsed. It is not possible in a single community for many to lose their capital without involving more in the same disaster. Take it from me—though you can see it for yourselves—the system of credit and finance that operates at Rome, in the market-place here, is tied up with the finances of Asia. A collapse there means a crash here.' (*On Pompey's Command* [66 B.C.], 7.)

It is clear that the capitalist class had a direct interest in promoting imperial expansion, not like their modern counterparts for the sake of raw materials and markets, but to open up new fields for taxation and usury. Modern capitalism, whatever its faults, has at least been constructive: factories, power-houses, harbours, railways, are among its monuments. But the capitalists of the Roman Republic were almost wholly predatory and parasitic. They may have promoted certain beneficial enterprises, such as the exploitation of the mineral wealth of undeveloped regions. But their main function was to speed the one-way traffic of goods and services from subject territories to the imperial city.

We are tempted to picture the Roman Knights as creatures with the heartless avarice of a Crassus but without his pretensions to culture and public spirit.



Yet clearly many of them were amiable gentlemen who took credit to themselves for minding their lawful business and steering clear of party feuds. Here, for instance, is a contemporary portrait of Cicero's long-suffering confidant, Pomponius Atticus, a Roman who was proud of his good knightly descent and had no wish to better it. Atticus inherited a large fortune from an uncle, who had been estranged from his other relatives by his 'very difficult nature'. He spent much of it in handsome benefactions to Athens and other Greek cities and in helping his many personal friends out of their difficulties.

'In public life he played such a part that, while he was always rightly reckoned an adherent of the "Best" party, he never entrusted himself to the stormy sea of politics, holding that those who make this venture are no more their own masters than those who are tossed on the ocean wave. He did not seek office, though not debarred by lack of support or ability, believing that in an age of extravagant electioneering it could neither be sought according to the custom of our ancestors nor gained without breach of the law, and in a city whose morals were corrupted it could not be exercised in the public interest without danger. When forfeited goods came under the hammer, he was never a bidder. He was never a contractor or a guarantor for any public contract. He never brought or supported an accusation against any man. He never went to law about his own property. He never sat on a jury. When invited to serve on the staff of a Consul or Praetor, he would accept the honour but decline the profit he could have made by accompanying him to his province. . . .

'He had inherited from his uncle an old-fashioned house, tastefully rather than expensively planned, in which he changed nothing unless compelled by the ravages of time. His household staff by practical standards was the best possible, though judged by appearances it was barely average. It included highly educated slaves, excellent readers and many copyists, so that there was not a lackey among them who was not skilled in both accomplishments. No less excellent were the other specialists required for the upkeep of the establishment. Every one of these was born and trained in the house—evidence of restraint and hard work on the part of the master. . . . At his dinner parties no one ever heard any entertainment but a reader, which for my part I consider the most agreeable of all, and he never dined without some reading, so that the guests were no less refreshed in mind than in body. For he used to invite guests whose tastes were not too different from his own. When he came into his fortune, he made no change in his style of living. . . . He had no gardens, no costly suburban or sea-side villa, and only two country estates in Italy. All his income came from property in Epirus and in the city.' (Cornelius Nepos: *Life of Atticus*, 6 & 13.)

The biographer mentions that, while Atticus pursued his life of Epicurean tranquillity, almost all his friends perished in the civil wars, on one side or the other. He does not inform us, though it is a fair assumption, that his property in Epirus was part of the land confiscated a century before by a Roman general who sold 150,000 Epirotes into slavery.

### (iii) *'The Dregs of Romulus'*<sup>1</sup>

Senators and Knights together, though they were prone to forget the fact, constituted only a small minority of the Roman people. The bulk of Roman citizens were still yeoman farmers. Their number had been greatly augmented

<sup>1</sup> So Cicero styles the Roman populace (*Letters to Atticus*, II, I, 8).

by the laws of 90-89 B.C. which extended the citizenship to all free Italians (thus adding incidentally to the number of Knights also, though not of Senators). This concession (a resumption after many years of the wise policy of the early Republic) was won only by an armed revolt of the Italian allies. Though the newly enfranchised multitude gained in social and legal status, they had little direct political influence, since they could not cast their votes without travelling to Rome and even then they had to vote in the 'rural tribes', which could always be outvoted by the urban ones. Conceivably, if the Italian communities had adopted a system of representative government like that of the Achaian and Aetolian Leagues, they might have enabled the Roman constitution to develop on democratic lines. Augustus actually toyed with the notion that votes recorded in the Italian municipalities might be sent to Rome in ballot boxes. But no such experiment was ever tried.

The Italian peasantry were hard hit by the obligations of military service and the competition of slave labour on big estates, not only in Italy itself but in fertile provinces such as Sicily and 'Africa' (Tunisia), from which abundant supplies of cheap corn were imported to Rome. But with luck they could still make a living either on their own small-holdings or as hired labourers on the estates of the wealthy. In Varro's dialogue *On Husbandry* (c. 35 B.C.), though it is addressed to his fellow landlords, we get some glimpses of the general life of the countryside.

'The first consideration in choosing the site of a farm is whether or not the neighbourhood is safe: for there are many good sites which it does not pay to cultivate because of the local prevalence of brigandage. . . . Sites with good communications for export and import are profitable. . . . Roses and violets and other products for which the city provides a market can be profitably grown on suburban farms, but not in the heart of the country. Again, if there are villages or towns near by, or even well provided estates or country seats, where you can buy cheaply what you need for the farm or dispose of surplus produce such as stakes or poles or rushes, the farm is more profitable than if you had to import these things, sometimes even than if you could produce them on your own land. So in such situations farmers prefer to have neighbours whom they can hire by the year as physicians, laundrymen, or smiths rather than have these craftsmen [as slaves] on their own estates, where it may happen that the death of one of them will undo their whole profit. . . . A farm is also more profitable if there are good wagon roads handy, or navigable streams. . . .

'All farms are cultivated by men, either slaves or free men or both. The free men may be either poor men tilling their own plots with their families, as most do; or hired hands employed on the bigger jobs, such as vintage or hay-making; or "debt-workers" [serfs?], as our people call them, who are still a large class in Asia, Egypt and Illyricum [Yugo-Slavia]. In general, hired labour pays better than slave labour in unhealthy sites, or even in wholesome sites for heavy work such as storing the fruits of vintage or harvest.' (i, 16-17.)

Poets were loud in their praise of the countryman's life, his body hardened by healthy toil, his spirit refreshed by the innocent mirth and simple piety of the rustic festivals. But the countryfolk thought otherwise. Year by year they drifted in to the towns (we know, for instance, that Pompeii was growing rapidly) and especially into Rome—the 'common cesspool', as Sallust called it. This flight from the land, as we have seen, was a typical feature of that Hellenistic civilization into which Italy was now being absorbed. Moreover, while the ill

distributed fruits of Roman victories made life especially hard for the Italian peasantry, they enhanced the allurements of city life. To quote Sallust again: 'The lads who had scraped a bare subsistence from the soil by the labour of their hands were tempted by the private and public largesses to change this thankless toil for a lazy life in the city.' (*Catiline*, 37 [c. 40 B.C.]).

For the majority, indeed, the city had little to offer but cramped quarters on the third or fourth floor of a squalid tenement house, exposed to the 'twin pests' of conflagration and ollapse, and with little privacy for family life and little relief through any sort of social service or organized charity. To the actual inhabitants it can have been small consolation that by this time the Roman skyscrapers presented an impressive appearance without parallel in the ancient world.

'In some cities we may see both public buildings and private dwellings, even of kings, built of brick. . . . I will explain why this style may not be adopted by the Roman People in the City. The public laws do not allow walls more than a foot and a half thick to be erected on state property, and other walls are limited to the same thickness to save space. Now brick walls, unless they be two or three bricks thick, will not support on this thickness more than one upper storey. But the majesty of the City and the limitless concourse of citizens demanded an innumerable array of dwellings. Since the area could not accommodate such a multitude of inhabitants on the level, the situation has compelled recourse to increasing the height of buildings. Therefore lofty structures with stone pillars, tiled roofs and walls of rough-hewn masonry, traversed at various heights by the floor-boards of upper rooms, serve by their diversity the most useful ends. With its living space thus multiplied in the vertical dimension by several storeys, the Roman People is not prevented from enjoying excellent dwelling-places.' (Vitruvius: *On Architecture*, II, viii, 17.)

The city was indeed blest with a free water supply, thanks to the admirable system of aqueducts (begun as early as 312 B.C.). Corn was cheap, thanks to the state supply organized by Gaius Gracchus and gradually transformed by vote-catching politicians into a free dole. Work was less strenuous than on the farm, but the average townsman could not afford a life of idleness. He was precariously employed, at wages kept down by slave competition, on some handicraft or retail business. Roman craftsmen were organized in guilds, eight of which were old enough to be attributed to the legendary king Numa.<sup>1</sup> These guilds had none of the economic power possessed by modern trade unions, but in the late Republic they did acquire a certain political power which led to their suppression under the Empire except for purely social functions such as dinner parties and the provision of funerals. It may almost be said that politics was the only trade that recognized the rights of organized labour, and that consequently the sale of his vote was the most profitable undertaking in which the poorer citizen could engage. Much of the profit doubtless went to the bosses who ran the racket and whose armed gangs often fought for possession of the polling place, but on the whole it was the one material advantage that the Roman People in the mass derived from participation in the conquest of the world. Apart from direct bribery, the masses enjoyed the gladiatorial contests and other lavish entertainments provided by even the most parsimonious candidate for public office. It is not hard to sympathize with the overburdened peasant, lured from the daily grind of the fields by the excitements of town life—the spectacular religious festivities, the triumphal processions of victorious generals, the perpetual stir and bustle of

<sup>1</sup> Flute-players, gold-smelters, smiths, dyers, cordwainers, curriers bronze-workers, potters.

an empire's capital, and the sense of power and importance that he experienced as elector and legislator. But, while he chose to sell his power for 'bread and circuses', he was left powerless to win from his rulers any serious consideration of his grievances. He had none of the opportunities for self-expression and self-improvement which a far more modest imperialism brought to the Periclean Athenian. He had become what the Roman lawyers called *proletarius*, one who having no taxable property could serve the state only by begetting offspring (*proles*). The state needed his offspring to fight her battles, and in this obligation lay the root of such real power as he possessed over the destiny of his nation and of the world.

#### (iv) *Subjects and Allies*

The nations that had submitted, after various degrees of hesitation or resistance to 'the faith of the Roman People' fall naturally into two groups, a Western and an Eastern, with very little in common. Within each group there was a distinction, of great but diminishing importance, between those tribes or kingdoms or cities that had voluntarily enrolled themselves as allies of Rome, retaining various liberties guaranteed by treaty, and those that ranked as enemies subdued by conquest, usually accompanied by some measure of enslavement and confiscation of land besides the imposition of tribute. And within each state there was a distinction, more important than our sources generally suggest, between privileged and unprivileged classes and individuals.

The Western group comprised the Iberian, Keltic and other tribes extending from Spain and Gaul (France) through the Alpine regions into the northern Balkans. With these we may class the natives of North Africa, apart from the Phoenician settlements which were partly broken up in the Punic Wars. Among all these the Romans had to face some stiff initial resistance, organized by chieftains who attracted a following by their personal prowess. But they usually succeeded in winning over rival chiefs by bribes, including individual grants of citizenship. And in general, after the preliminary phase of massacre and enslavement and the disintegration of the tribal framework, they were not hampered in the work of Romanization by any strong national sentiment or culture.

The Hellenic cities and Hellenized kingdoms of the East were better equipped than the Western barbarians to put up an organized military resistance; but, once this was overcome, they were for the most part even more ready to submit. Apart from the Macedonians, whom it took three stubborn wars to subdue, and the Jews, whom the Romans were at pains to conciliate, the Eastern peoples gave little proof of active national spirit. The educated classes were naturally resentful and puzzled at the triumph of Barbarians whom they regarded as their inferiors in everything except (as they were forced to admit) the art of war.

'The early history of Rome is still unknown to well-nigh all the Greeks, and many have been deluded by false stories based only on casual hearsay into the belief that the city's first settlers were homeless vagabonds and Barbarians and not even free men and that it was not by piety and justice and the other elements of virtue that she eventually attained to universal empire but by some automatic process and unjust fortune that blindly gives the greatest of goods to the least deserving. The more disgruntled rail openly at fortune for giving the good things of the Greeks to the vilest of Barbarians.'<sup>1</sup>

This prejudice persisted. But, as the Romans became more Hellenized and as their ancient history was woven into the fabric of Greek heroic legend, they were

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus: *Roman Antiquities* [c. 20 B.C.] i, 4. Cf. Onasander: *The General* [c. A.D. 50]: 'To my thinking it is not by chance that the Romans have overpassed the bounds of Italy and extended their dominion to the ends of the earth, but by feats of military skill.'

less grudgingly accepted in the Greek scheme of things. The ruling classes in the Hellenistic states had been quick to recognize in the Roman order a prop for their own privileges. The Achaians, for instance, were glad of Roman aid against Nabis king of Sparta (207-192 B.C.), who had revived by more violent methods the revolutionary policy of Agis and Cleomenes, 'slaying the most respectable of the Spartans and enlisting the scum of the earth as mercenary guards' (to quote the not unprejudiced version of Diodorus). When the kingdom of Pergamum was 'bequeathed' to the Roman people and became the province of Asia (133 B.C.), the wealthier classes accepted their fate, but a youthful claimant to the throne, Aristonicus, 'went up into the interior and got together a large following of poor men and slaves, to whom he offered freedom, calling them *Heliopolitans* ("Citizens of the Sun")'.<sup>1</sup> The moving spirit of this enterprise was a Stoic philosopher, Blossius of Cumae, who as tutor to the brothers Gracchus had already shown his zeal as an idealistic reformer. The visionary City of the Sun, modelled perhaps on the Utopian fantasy of Iambulus, was short-lived. Aristonicus ended his days in a Roman prison, and Blossius, like a true Stoic, killed himself. But we have seen how, forty years later, the oppressed people of Asia hailed the barbarian invader Mithradates as a deliverer and massacred the Roman tax-collectors and their satellites. In the same year (88 B.C.) Mithradates sought to enlist the support of the Athenians. Though these had been relatively well treated by their Roman masters, the king's emissary found grievances enough to give some substance to his appeal.

'What, then, is my advice? Not to tolerate the anarchy which the Roman Senate has allowed to drag on until it shall deign to approve a constitution for us. Not to look on inactive at temples shut, gymnasia deep in dust, theatre unthronged, law-courts voiceless and the Assembly Hill, which oracles of the gods have proclaimed divine, ravished from the people—at the holy voice of Dionysus silenced, at the mystic shrine of the Two Goddesses closed down, at the schools of the philosophers without a voice.' (Posidonius, in Athenaeus, v, 51.)

Much of this harangue (if it was actually delivered) was rhetorical exaggeration; but it was true that the Romans, with their habitual suspicion of secret assembly and free speech, had imposed restrictions on the *Mysteriæ* of Demeter and Persephoné at Eleusis and on the philosophic schools<sup>2</sup> and had bridled democracy in the interests of the rich. Encouraged by the initial successes of Mithradates, the Athenian *demos* enjoyed a last brief taste of its ancient liberties, coupled with a reign of terror against the pro-Roman oligarchy.

Instances like this are evidence that the Roman order was felt as a burden by the poorer classes. But it was the propertied classes who had most to lose when it degenerated into the disorder that marked the government of Sicily by Verres or of 'Asia' by Flaccus (whom Cicero illogically defended). As Roman rule grew more and more arbitrary and irresponsible, it seemed as though the Romans, having destroyed all other ordered government throughout the Mediterranean world, were unable or unwilling to impose an order of their own. There was some justification even for Cicero's wildest declamations.

'The Roman people is assailed past endurance by every nation—not with violence, not with arms, not with war, but with outcries, with tears, with lamentation.' (*Against Verres*, II, iii, 89 (207).)

<sup>1</sup> Strabo: xiv, 1 (38).

<sup>2</sup> Cf., however, Cicero's charming story (*Laws*, I, 53) of the Roman governor who promised the Athenian philosophers that, if they would accept his services as arbiter, he would help them to reach an amicable settlement of their age-long disputes.

Amid the general distress there were plenty of enterprising individuals who contrived in one way or another to cash in on the Roman conquest, especially by seeking their fortune in the imperial city itself. Greeks and Orientals far excelled the 'Latin boor' in the art of ministering to the tastes of their masters, no matter how elevated or how degraded. In the households of men like Lucullus they found an opening for their versatile talents in every capacity, from moral philosopher to contortionist, from laudatory poet to *chef de cuisine*. Long before Juvenal's outburst of envious hate, the 'hungry Greekling' was a familiar figure at Rome, and Syrian Orontes had begun to muddy the pure waters of Tiber.

To offset this flow of immigrants, there was no such outward stream as we might expect on the analogy of the colonial empires of modern times. The policy of colonization, so important in the Roman conquest of Italy, was not extended on a big scale to the provinces except by Julius Caesar, who is said to have 'dispersed 80,000 citizens into colonies overseas'. Caesar established Roman colonies at Carthage (where the settlement of Gaius Gracchus had been a failure), at Corinth, in Asia and above all in Spain. Some of the colonists were veterans of his legions, though most of these were given land in Italy. In the Eastern provinces they were mostly ex-slaves of Greek or Asiatic origin. In Spain they were Iberians who earned Roman citizenship as a reward of loyalty. Caesar was thus following in the West the policy of urbanization, which had already been tried in the wilder parts of Asia by his rival Pompey, in continuance of the traditional methods of the Hellenistic kings. In Spain, indeed, the Roman conquest acted from the beginning (c. 200 B.C.) as a civilizing force. During the years 80-72, when Spain was a place of refuge for Romans of the Popular party fleeing from Sulla's reign of terror, much was done to Romanize the country by the Popular leader Sertorius, who even founded a school for the sons of native chiefs. The picture painted by the Greek geographer Strabo of the Iberian Peninsula under the early Empire testifies to a long process of Romanization, which must have been far advanced even under the Republic. A few extracts, illustrating its varying character in different districts, may serve as a corrective to the black record on which we have dwelt hitherto.

'Though the country of the Lusitanians, to the north of the Tagus, is rich in crops and cattle and mineral wealth, most of them had given up living on the produce of the soil and taken to brigandage and perpetual warfare among themselves and against their neighbours across the Tagus, till they were stopped by the Romans, who broke their spirit and reduced most of their cities [or 'townships'] to villages, while grouping a few of them together to form better cities. The originators of this lawlessness were the highlanders: for, occupying a barren country with few possessions, they naturally coveted the wealth of others. Those who resisted their raids were inevitably prevented from attending to their own work, so that they too changed from farmers to warriors and the neglected land, ceasing to bear crops, became a haunt of brigands. . . . The life of all the highlanders is rude. They drink water, sleep on the ground, eat goat's flesh and sacrifice a he-goat to the War God, besides prisoners of war and horses. They contend in racing, boxing and mimic skirmishes. For two thirds of the year they live on bread made of ground acorns. Their chief drink is beer. They have little wine, and when they have any they speedily exhaust it in feasting with their fellow clansmen. Instead of olive oil they use butter. At meals they sit on benches built round the walls, observing gradations of age and dignity, while the food is passed round. During the carouse they dance to the strains of pipe and trumpet, springing in the air and crouching down. In Bastetania [the coastland near Gibraltar] the women even join in dances with the men,

holding their hands. All the men wear dark costume, chiefly plaids, in which they also fling themselves down to sleep. . . . The women wear robes and bright-coloured gowns. Instead of coinage tribes living far inland practise barter, or cut off pieces of silver plate. . . . Down to the pro-consulship of Brutus [136 B.C.] they used coracles of leather, but now even dug-out canoes are rare. . . . The untamed and savage character of these tribes sprang not only from their perpetual wars but from their remoteness, whether by sea or by land. Having little contact with others, they lost the sense of community and fellow-feeling. But under the influence of peace and the Roman settlements they are now less wild and savage than formerly. . . .

'The region watered by the Baetis [Guadalquivir] is called Baetica or Turdetania. . . . The Turdetanians are accounted the wisest of the Iberians. They have a written literature, with histories and poems and metrical laws. . . . Turdetania is said to contain as many as 200 cities, of which the most notable are situated on rivers or estuaries or on the coast, because of trade facilities. Pre-eminent in power and renown are Cordova, the first Roman colony in these parts, which was founded by Marcellus [152 B.C.] of mixed Roman and native settlers, and Cadiz, a great commercial centre, which allied itself with the Romans. . . . The Baetis is navigable a little above Cordova, and the adjacent country is excellently cultivated and delightful to the eye with groves and orchards. . . . All the trade of Turdetania is carried on with Italy and Rome. . . . Ships are built of native timber, and exports include corn, wine and olive oil, wax and honey, kermes and cinnabar, salt fish and fine woollen stuffs. . . . Nowhere in the world is there such abundance of gold, silver, copper and iron. . . . Most of the cities are inhabited by Phoenicians, . . . who held the best part of Spain and [North] Africa before the age of Homer and remained masters of these territories till the Romans put an end to their supremacy. . . . In keeping with the prosperity of their country, the character of the Turdetanians is mild and civilized (*politikos*). And the same applies to the Keltic inhabitants, though with less force, for most of these latter still live in villages. But the Turdetanians, and especially those living near the Baetis, have gone over completely to the Roman way of life, to the extent of forgetting their own language. Most of them have acquired Latin status and have received Roman colonists, so that they are not far from being all Romans. These Iberians are called *togati*, and among them are the Keltiberians, once thought the most savage of all. . . . The name *togati* is equivalent to peaceable, as though with the adoption of the *toga* they had changed to civilization and the Italian manner.' (iii, 2-3.)

#### (v) 'Living Tools'

However heavily Roman imperialism may have weighed on the free citizens or tribesmen of the conquered countries, its impact was infinitely more crushing on the large class to whom it brought the loss even of personal liberty. In the older civilizations slavery was endemic, its evils mitigated by law and custom, by the humanitarian spirit of Hellenism, at the very least by the economic value of the 'living tools'. The Roman conquerors were free from all these restraints. Cato, the model of Roman virtue, could afford to sell off his slaves, like his other tools, when they were worn out and superfluous: there were plenty more where they came from. Apart from the wholesale enslavement of 'rebellious' populations, like the 150,000 Epirotes mentioned above, or the 53,000 members of one Gaulish tribe whom Caesar sold in one day, a flourishing slave trade sprang up to meet the inexhaustible demands of Italy and Sicily. It was fed with captives taken in minor wars (not necessarily involving Roman arms) or kidnapped by

brigands or pirates, who sometimes contrived, ironically enough, to lay hands on well-born Romans. Apollo's holy isle of Delos became a slave market, which sometimes handled as many as 10,000 human chattels in a day. Despite the heavy wastage, it has been estimated that by the end of the Republic Italy may have contained, among a total population of about 14,000,000, some 4,000,000 slaves, not only aliens but (to quote a Roman proverb) 'every slave an enemy'.

Three times in the later years of the Republic this latent enmity blazed into open warfare on a big scale, twice in Sicily and once in Italy itself. The details of the First Sicilian Slave War (135-132 B.C.) are not only picturesque but highly significant as a revelation of the social conditions underlying a great series of movements, from the contemporary revolt of Aristonicus to the more peaceful revolt that began a century and a half later in Palestine.

'[The Sicilian land-owners], having raised their standard of living and acquired great wealth, began to accumulate a multitude of slaves. As soon as a herd of them had been driven in from the pens, their new masters would brand them. Then they used the younger ones as herdsmen, the others as need might require. They worked them oppressively and allowed them little in the way of food or clothing. In consequence, most of them supported themselves by robbery; and the Island became full of bloodshed, with robbers dispersed everywhere like guerrilla bands. The governors tried to check them, but for fear of their masters' power they were forced to connive at the pillaging of the province. For most of the owners, being Roman knights and jurymen, had a hold over the governors. The slaves, oppressed by sufferings and blows and senseless indignities, reached the limit of endurance. They began to get together, as occasion served, and plot revolt, till at length they turned their plot into action.

'In the household of Antigenes of Enna there was a Syrian slave named Eunus, an adept in magic and sorcery. He pretended to foretell the future by divine admonitions received during sleep, and by his aptitude for this sort of thing he deceived many. Gaining confidence, he began to act as though he had waking visions of the gods and heard the future from their lips. As a few of his many guesses happened to come true and attract attention, while his failures passed unnoticed, his reputation grew. Finally he contrived, by concealing a hollow nutshell in his mouth, to breathe out fire and flame, and thus deliver his oracles like one possessed. He used to declare that the Syrian goddess [Astarté] appeared to him and prophesied that he would be a king. Antigenes, highly amused, would call up Eunus at his dinner parties and question him about his kingdom and what he would do to each of the guests. His calm recital of his intentions, how gently he would deal with his masters and so forth, accompanied with a lot of hocus-pocus, was greeted with shouts of laughter. Some would offer him titbits from the table, begging him when he became king to remember the favour. Yet this kingship, so fantastically prophesied, was fulfilled in fact, and the favours conferred in jest were required in earnest. There was at Enna a certain Damophilus, a wealthy man of overbearing temper, whose wife Megallis vied with him in brutality to their slaves. Rendered savage by this treatment, they planned revolt and murder and asked Eunus whether the gods favoured the enterprise. He, with his usual display of signs and wonders, declared that they did, and asked to take part. They forthwith mustered 400 of their fellow slaves and, seizing an opportunity, snatched up arms and rushed into Enna with Eunus at their head, breathing out fire and flames.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Diodorus of Sicily, xxxvi. The reference to Knights as jurymen before 123 B.C. is a mistake (*cf.* above, p. 300), but possibly the abuse of this power by Equestrian landlords may have contributed to the outbreak of the Second Slave War.



The slaves were soon masters of Enna. They held a formal assembly in the theatre, where they chose this strange Messiah to be their king and meted out rough justice to their oppressors. Damophilus and Megallis, like many others, were tortured to death, but their daughter, who had been kind to the slaves, was treated with consideration and courtesy, 'showing that the behaviour of the slaves was not natural brutality but a requital of past wrongs'. The revolt spread rapidly through the island. Eunus assumed the royal name of Antiochus and set up a court on the Seleucid model, complete with court jester. For over three years he ruled over the country districts of Sicily and many of the towns, defeating several Roman armies. Eventually Roman discipline prevailed. The revolt was crushed as savagely as it had begun. The poor king's courage failed him at the last—perhaps with the sudden realization that his goddess had betrayed him.

The Second Sicilian Slave War (103-99 B.C.) was started by another wild visionary, one Salvius, 'a soothsayer and flute-player at the women's mysteries', aided by a Cilician astrologer. Instead of the insignia of an oriental monarch, Salvius assumed the purple-edged *toga* and *fasces* of a Roman magistrate. He appears, during his term of office, to have discharged the duties to better effect than some of his more constitutionally appointed colleagues. Still more threatening to the Roman power was the great revolt of the Italian slaves in 73-71 B.C., led by the gladiator Spartacus, whose army dominated a great part of the Peninsula till it was at length defeated by the millionaire Crassus. The survivors, by the thousand, were crucified along the roadside for the reassurance of the law-abiding.

These violent interludes (to which there is no parallel in Greek history except the Helot revolts in Sparta)<sup>1</sup> give some indication of the fire that smouldered beneath the crust of Roman civilization. There were other occasions on which this mass of combustible material was used for selfish ends by political adventurers. But such outbreaks are no more typical than general strikes are typical of capitalism. Normally, apart from certain unhappy classes and individuals, the slaves must have struck a balance with their masters by which life remained at least tolerable. They were exempt from many of the anxieties and responsibilities of the free man, notably military service. A skilled slave in the household of a Lucullus or an Atticus would have been in no hurry to change places with a struggling member of the proletariat. He had a good chance of manumission—all the better because the supply of new slaves was so plentiful—and as a freedman he might aspire to wealth and consequent power. His grandsons would rank without qualification as Roman citizens. Scipio was doubtless exaggerating when he claimed that the Gracchan party consisted mainly of men whom he had brought to Rome in chains; but these 'stepsons of Italy' were certainly a large and growing class.

The Roman moralists, so blind to the evils of slavery itself, were worried about a practice which gave the freedom of the city to a miscellaneous rabble. Some modern theorists have followed them in ascribing the decadence of the Roman character to 'racial contamination'. Actually, the influx of new blood might have been beneficial, since there is no reason to regard the newcomers as racially inferior to the mixed stock already present in Italy. But the effect on traditional Roman culture was certainly disruptive. These men, throughout their active lives, had surrendered their moral responsibility to the whims of a master. It is not surprising if they developed the slave character as depicted by the ancient comedians—sycophantic, shifty, deceitful and work-shy. It would have been highly surprising if they had readily acquired the difficult virtues of

<sup>1</sup> But cf. the casual remark of Antiphanes (4th Century B.C.) that a man is always liable to be murdered by his slaves when out walking or when sleeping.

the free citizen. Among the men who accepted the autocracy of the Roman Empire were many who had never known anything but autocracy in their private lives.

(vi) *The Unvanquished Legions*

The power of magistrate and millionaire at home, of pro-magistrate and publican in the provinces, however they might explain it to themselves, was in fact the power to issue or inspire orders which the Roman legionary was willing to obey. Down to the end of the 2nd Century B.C., the Roman army was a citizen levy, obedient to its officers as representatives of the 'Senate and People of Rome'. Added to this obedience was a personal loyalty to a great commander like Scipio—a loyalty whose strength had never been tested because it had never come into conflict with their patriotism.

After the failure of Gaius Gracchus, the Senatorial class had forfeited the allegiance of many of the poorer citizens; they were obliged to conciliate financial interests, and they were losing their class solidarity. But the fatal blow came when they began to lose their military prestige as the officer class. In 111 B.C. the Romans became involved in a war with Jugurtha, king of Numidia (Algeria). It was widely believed, and probably not without justification, that the wily African owed his repeated escapes to judicious bribery of the Senatorial commanders, and at Rome a popular agitation was started against the 'proud and pitiless crimes of the nobility'. The war was won in 107 by a man of the people, Gaius Marius, who had risen from the ranks by sheer military genius, though the actual capture of Jugurtha was effected by the not inferior genius of Marius' lieutenant Sulla, a true-blue aristocrat. In furtherance of their personal jealousy and ambition, these two unscrupulous men set themselves to widen the growing cleavage between the Popular Party and the Best People. The decisive step was taken by Marius: as Consul in 107 he abandoned the traditional method of recruiting for the legions by a periodical levy, which fell chiefly on the small-holder class, and began the enlistment of volunteers, who tended to be landless labourers or debt-burdened adventurers. In this way he built up a long-term professional army, highly trained, bound by strong ties to its commander and with relatively little stake in the country. By its aid he crushed a horde of Celtic or Germanic invaders, the Cimbri and Teutons, who had seemed about to repeat the triumph of the Gauls nearly three centuries before. With this weapon in their hands, the Popular Party were able to push through some of the reforms for which the purely political power of the Gracchi had not availed. For a while they held their weapon in reserve. At length, being outwitted in intrigue, they turned it to direct use. By sentence of outlawry (*proscription*) the leading nobles were condemned to death and their property confiscated (87 B.C.). But Sulla, who had been engaged in driving Mithradates from the province of Asia and avenging the massacred publicans, also had a loyal army at his back. Returning in haste to Rome, he outdid the ferocity of the Marians and re-established the aristocratic régime on a firmer legal basis than before.

For the next half century the sword of civil strife never rested very easily in the scabbard. While the underlying cause of the trouble was that deep-seated social disharmony which we have attempted to analyse, its most obvious symptom was a manœuvring for military power whose constitutional basis became less and less important. The general the troops would follow was the one who had led them to victory in the past or who promised them allotments of land or other favours in the future; they were not going to enquire too deeply whether his election to the consulship had been a strictly legal procedure. When Pompey (Gnaeus Pompeius) inherited Sulla's army and eclipsed his victories in Asia, he found himself compelled against his own inclinations to inherit Sulla's political

power. He had to share it for a while with Crassus, because Crassus had turned his money into soldiers—only to lead them to death and disaster in a desert campaign against the Parthians. Finally, Pompey lost his power to Gaius Julius Caesar, because Caesar had undertaken the thankless task of subduing Rome's most dreaded enemies, the Gauls, and in so doing had created the finest and most devoted army the world had yet seen. That devotion outlived his death: in a very real sense the Senators who murdered Caesar in the name of their aristocratic liberty were defeated by Caesar's ghost as well as by the armies of Antony and Octavian. The lordly Roman Republic died on the field of Philippi (42 B.C.). When a new war sprang up between the two victors, it might well seem, to those capable of taking a wider view, that this could be nothing but a personal squabble between the armies of two rival despots—a further step in a process that could end only in the break-up of that unity which the Romans had imposed on the Mediterranean world.

### *Wider View*

If there was anyone, in that age of short-sighted partisanship, with sufficient understanding and detachment to view the Mediterranean scene as a whole, what must have been his impression of the present and his hope for the future? At first glance he would have seen little but disintegration—economic, political and moral: whole populations exterminated or enslaved; flourishing territories devastated by rapacious armies and the more systematic rapacity of magistrate and tax-collector; peasants and traders, deprived of their normal livelihood, turning in despair to brigandage and piracy; the Roman soldiery, who had broken up so many old-established monarchies, city-states and tribal organizations, turning their own constitution into an internecine dog-fight. Where the rights and wrongs of every dispute were settled sooner or later by the Roman war-cry 'Woe to the vanquished', men found it hard to cling to the traditional standards of civilized behaviour, lacking as these generally were in any deep-rooted religious foundation. Among the conquered, prolonged servitude (as Cicero observed) had made many accomplished yes-men and left few 'worthy of Ancient Greece'.<sup>1</sup> Among the conquerors, the sterner virtues of Rome had hardened to a brutal lust for power. Responsibility for guiding the destiny of all these varied communities had devolved on the shoulders of a few irresponsible men, who seemed to have very little notion what to do about it.

But the picture had its brighter side. The same legionaries who had smashed the centres of Hellenistic civilization were spreading a diluted form of it in Gaul and Spain.<sup>2</sup> The slave-traders were renewing on a vast scale the Greek colonization of the West. Under the influence of Hellenism a few Latin writers such as Lucretius and Catullus were expressing themselves with a freshness and vigour which had been absent from Greek literature for some generations. And, thanks to such gifted Greek teachers as Posidonius and Panaetius, a few of the conquerors were beginning to visualize the victories of Roman arms as leading through the destruction of localized loyalties to the actualization of the Stoic *Cosmopolis*. This conception inspired the efforts of Roman jurists to build up a Law of Nations on the basis of the 'Law of Nature'. And to some extent it guided the policy of Roman statesmen, in so far as they can be said to have had one.

The average Senator scarcely had a policy, except to oppose everything that seemed to threaten the old order. Sulla, the most far-sighted of the conservative party, had no illusions as to the permanence of his reactionary measures. There was a losing battle, even in the days when Cato the Censor made his ostentatious

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Letters to his Brother*, I, 1, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, IV, 1 (5), remarks that, since the Roman conquest, the Gauls near Marseilles had submitted more readily to Hellenization.

stand against foreign commitments, social reform, moral decadence and Greek culture. In the days of his great-grandson and admirer, Cato the Younger, who fought to the death against Caesar, the battle was already lost. But the Younger Cato and his disciple Brutus at least added dignity to their cause, if not logic, by linking the defence of the old order with the Stoic doctrine of liberty and universal brotherhood. We may dismiss this aristocratic Stoicism as merely a priggish and narrow code of personal honour, but at least it gave men a cause to die for—a cause that continued to claim its martyrs for some time after the establishment of the Empire.

On the Popular side, Tiberius Gracchus appears to have combined Stoic ideals, rather more logically, with a vision of Rome as an imperial democracy on the Periclean model. Of his successors it is hard to say whether their attacks on particular privileges and abuses were aimed at any clearly visualized target. Caesar is perhaps an exception. He had the Roman love of order without the Roman respect for tradition. He did much during his brief spell of power to promote a more efficient social system, planting agricultural and commercial colonies, reorganizing provincial and municipal government, reforming currency and the calendar. In doing so he freely disregarded those manifold gradations of status which were the mainstay of the old order: he even went so far as to enrol freedmen and provincials in the Senate. But he was no democrat. From his acts we should rather infer that he dreamt of the Roman world as a unified whole, governed by an autocrat through the most efficient instruments available. But he carried his dream to the grave with him—unless perhaps he imparted a hint of it to the great-nephew Octavian whom he adopted as his son and heir.

For a theoretical justification of Rome's world domination, an ideal picture of the Romanism that was to supplant Hellenism, we must turn once more to Caesar's contemporary Marcus Tullius Cicero, the country lawyer who gate-crashed into the charmed circle of the Best People and attained (in 64 B.C.) to the dignity of Consul. With all his weaknesses, Cicero was a man of excellent intentions and relatively wide sympathies, sincerely anxious to grapple with the problems of his age. Although before a Roman audience he had sometimes to apologize for his familiarity with Greek philosophy, he was enough of a Roman to subordinate philosophy to politics. He upheld the Stoic view that, since 'Virtue consists in practice, not in theory', the good man will dedicate himself to the service of the commonwealth, obeying 'the natural urge to make the life of men safer and richer' and 'closing his ears to the bugles that sound retreat'. What then is the commonwealth?

'A commonwealth (*res publica*) is the wealth of a people (*res populi*); and a people is not any assemblage of men herded together in any way, but the assemblage of a multitude united by agreement as to right and wrong and community of interest. For the first cause of coming together is not so much the weakness of men as their natural gregariousness. . . . If a free people chooses, as it will choose if it consults its own safety, to entrust itself to the best men, the safety of states clearly rests on the counsels of the best, especially as nature has enacted not only that those who are highest in virtue and strength of character should have authority over the weaker but that these should obey the highest. But this ideal constitution is overthrown by the false opinions of men who, having no knowledge of virtue, assume that the rich or the nobly born are the best. . . . When equal honour is accorded to the highest and the lowest, who must needs be in any people, that very equality is most inequitable. . . . Unless there be in the city an even balance of right and obligation and function, so that there is enough authority in the magistrates, enough weight in the counsels of the leaders

and enough liberty in the people, the constitution cannot be preserved free from change.' (Cicero: *Republic*, i, 2-3, 39, 51, 53; ii, 57.)

In this there was little that had not been said already by Aristotle. And the dialogue *On Laws*, in which (rather inconsistently) he maintains the doctrine of universal human equality, is no less indebted to the Stoics. But Cicero, at least in theory, had shaken off more thoroughly than any Greek writer, even of the Hellenistic Age, the limitations of nationalism. It is significant, for instance, that in the passages quoted hitherto from Greek authors there has never appeared a word that could most naturally be translated as 'civilization' or 'civilized', though the essence of the idea was of course to be found in some uses of *polis* and *asty* and their derivatives.<sup>1</sup> To a Greek it was sufficient to say 'Hellenic' as opposed to 'Barbaric'. Cicero maintains that, while the Romans might be 'Barbarians' in the Greek sense, they were not 'savage' (*ferus*) or 'inhuman'. He uses *humanitas* as a comprehensive term connoting those qualities that distinguish complete 'humanity' from mere brutishness and thus corresponding closely to our concept of 'civilization'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Cicero expresses not only a patriotic preference for practical Roman methods over Greek theorizing but a conviction of Rome's mission, if only she would be true to her own past, to unite and civilize mankind. A speaker in his *Republic* states in strong language the moral case against imperialism:

'Was it by justice or by wisdom that our people, whose dominion embraces the earth, was transformed from the least of nations to the greatest? All peoples who have been blest with empire, and not least the Roman world-conquerors, if they wished to be just—to restore to others what they have taken from them—would be obliged to return to hovels and to live in want and squalor. We may except, if we will, the Athenians and Arcadians who—presumably in the fear that this commandment of justice might some day be enforced—have invented the myth that they sprang from the earth like field-mice out of their fields.' (iii, 25.)

Cicero counters with the plea that 'our people conquered the earth by defending its allies', which he develops in his dialogue *On Duties*.

'So long as the empire of the Roman people was held by conferring benefits, not by inflicting wrongs, and wars were fought on behalf of the allies or with the empire at stake and concluded on mild terms or such as necessity dictated, so long was the Senate a haven of refuge for kings, peoples and tribes and our magistrates strove to earn the highest praise by defending provinces and allies fairly and honestly. That could be called a protectorate over the world more truly than an empire. For some time we have been gradually departing from this usage and standard. Since Sulla's victory we have lost it utterly: when such cruelty was wreaked upon citizens, we have ceased to think any treatment of allies unjust.' (ii, 26-27.)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 227 (Protagoras), p. 243 (Aristotle) and p. 253 (Eratosthenes). The passage from Strabo (p. 308) is later than Cicero and based on Roman sources. For Aristotle's word *apoliteutos*, applied to the northern Barbarians (*Politics* iv, 1327b), the obvious rendering is 'uncivilized'.

<sup>2</sup> So, in the *Republic* (i, 28) he speaks of 'confining the name of men to those who are polished with the distinctive arts of humanity'; in the *Defence of Sestius* (42) he refers to 'a life thoroughly polished with humanity'. Cf. Aulus Gellius, xiii, 16: 'The inventors and right users of Latin words meant by *humanitas* much what the Greeks mean by *paideia* or what we call education in the fine arts . . . since such knowledge is given to man only of all the animals . . . In this sense it is used especially by Varro and Cicero.' Vitruvius (II, i, 6, based on Varro?) speaks of men 'progressing from a wild and savage life to mild humanity'.

During his term as governor of Cilicia in Asia Minor, Cicero honestly tried to live up to this ideal, though he was continually pining to escape from this provincial backwater into the main stream of public life—it had ceased to matter very much what happened anywhere but at Rome. He was also, in his laudable desire to please everybody, extremely tender to the interests of other Romans less scrupulous than himself. In practice we find him deploring but reluctant to condemn the outrageous extortions of Brutus in Cyprus; and his philosophical writings breathe the same spirit of compromise. After denouncing as 'piratical' the action of the Senate in reimposing tribute on certain cities of Asia which had paid a heavy sum for immunity, he proceeds:

'Can any empire, which ought to be upheld by its fair fame and the good will of its allies, derive profit from hatred and infamy? I have even disagreed at times with my good friend Cato. He seemed to me to defend too stubbornly the revenue and the taxes, to deny everything to the publicans, much to the allies, whereas we [Senators] ought to have treated the latter with beneficence, the former as our own contractors, more especially as this co-operation of the classes was vital to the welfare of the state.' (*Duties*, iii, 88.)

This phrase 'co-operation' or 'concord of the classes' sums up Cicero's political ideal—a united front of the upper and middle classes against demagogues and despots. It was consistent on the whole with his political theories (except perhaps his condemnation of plutocracy) and it was also the consistent goal of his otherwise vacillating career as a statesman. He clung to this ideal not blindly—for he was well aware of its difficulties—but because he saw no alternative except chaos. As he grew older, he came (like Isocrates) to the conviction that maintenance of this harmony demanded the strong hand of an individual 'moderator'.

'As the navigator aims at a safe voyage, the physician at health, the general at victory, so the aim of this moderator of the commonwealth is the happy life of the citizens, that it may be strong in resources, rich in possessions, ample in glory, honourable in virtue. This is the task, the greatest and best among men, that I would wish him to accomplish.' (*Republic*, v, 8.)

At one time he had hopes that Pompey might qualify as his ideal ruler; but he proved a clay-footed idol. He could have no hopes of a ruthless innovator like Caesar; still less of a reckless soldier of fortune like Antony, who stood for nothing but the brilliant disruptive individualism of the Popular Party without its programme of reform. But he hoped for great things from Antony's partner Octavian, recognizing in him perhaps a prudent conservatism that might make him a fit instrument for continuing and enlarging the Roman tradition.

Cicero died disappointed at the hands of Antony's braves and with Octavian's connivance. But a few years later Antony allied himself openly with the enemies of the Roman people, aptly personified in Cleopatra of Egypt, last of the Hellenistic sovereigns and last champion of that older East which had resisted Hellenization and was bent on resisting Romanization; and Octavian found himself cast for the congenial role of defender of all things Roman. When, after his victory at Actium (31 B.C.), Octavian assumed the title of 'Augustus' and set himself cautiously to reconstruct the Roman world on the basis of 'concord of the classes', Cicero's dream seemed in prospect of fulfilment, and his friend Cornelius Nepos could declare that he had been a true prophet.

*The Augustan Compromise*

The life's work of Augustus, unsurpassed in the whole of history as the achievement of a single statesman, deserves to be regarded as the prelude to the two centuries of Roman Peace of which it laid the foundations and also as foreshadowing and in some measure inaugurating the long process of Decline and Fall. But the history of the Roman Empire cannot be understood apart from the rise of the Church whose founder was born in the later years of the first Emperor. And the combined story of Church and State cannot be squeezed in at the end of a book on this scale.

It is possible, however, to consider the rule of Augustus as closing a chapter rather than opening one. In a sense this is equally true of Christianity, which also came 'not to destroy but to fulfil'—to express with a new emphasis and revolutionary vigour much that had been implicit in Hebrew prophecy, Greek philosophy and the Mystery Religions of the East. But Augustus had no such new wine to offer, and he contrived to pour it with less immediately explosive effect into the old bottles. His aim was to conserve or revive anything that still had life in it; to give men what they had long been clamouring for, without waking new and disturbing desires. An inscription in the temple of 'Rome and Augustus' at Ankara has preserved the words in which the Emperor himself set forth the record of his long life in the form in which he wished posterity to remember it. A few passages will illustrate the mantle of conservatism in which he disguised even his most radical reforms:

'I undertook wars, both civil and foreign, by land and sea throughout the world; and emerging victorious I spared all surviving citizens. Such foreign nations as could be safely spared I chose rather to conserve than to destroy. Some 500,000 Roman citizens were enlisted in my service, of whom, when they had served their term, I established in colonies or returned to their boroughs rather more than 300,000; and to all these I gave lands bought by me or an equivalent in money. . . .

'At a time of great dearth I did not decline the administration of the grain supply, which I so conducted that in a few days I delivered the whole people from imminent panic and peril. . . .

'By passing new laws I restored many precedents of our ancestors which were dropping out of our usage, and myself established many new precedents to be followed by posterity.

'The temple of Janus, which our ancestors willed should be closed whenever the whole empire of the Roman people enjoyed peace with victory and which from the Founding of the City to my birth is recorded to have been closed only twice, was during my primacy by decree of the Senate closed three times. . . .

'I repaired the Capitol and Pompey's Theatre, both at great expense, without inscription of my name on either. I repaired the conduits of the aqueducts, which in many places were crumbling with age. . . . I repaired by decree of the Senate 82 temples of the gods in Rome. . . . I reconstructed the Flaminian Way from Rome to Rimini and all its bridges except two. . . .

'I twice exhibited gladiatorial contests in my own name and five times in the name of my sons and grandsons; the gladiators who took part in these contests totalled about 10,000. . . . I exhibited to the people 26 African beast-hunts in the Circus or the Forum or the Amphitheatres, in which the beasts slaughtered totalled about 3,500. . . .

'In the temples of all the cities of Asia I put back after my victory all the ornaments of which my adversary [Antony] had despoiled them. . . .

'I cleared the sea of pirates. In that war I recaptured almost 30,000

slaves, who had run away from their masters and taken up arms against the state, and handed them back to their masters for punishment. . . .

'I enlarged the bounds of all the provinces of the Roman people that bordered on the territory of nations still unsubdued. . . .

'When I had quenched the civil wars, having won supreme power by universal consent [or, as the Greek version puts it, "by the prayers of all my fellow-citizens"], I transferred the state from my own control to the disposal of the Senate and people of Rome.'

The work of Augustus was the answer of Roman statesmanship to the problems of the Hellenistic world. The very completeness of the answer was one reason why the Roman Empire, apart from the ferment of new religious movements, was on the whole an era of intellectual stagnation. The great writers of the Augustan Age were deliberately 'classical' and unoriginal; and later generations were content to imitate them with ever less success. The frontiers of the Empire, with minor exceptions, were left as Augustus drew them—along the banks of Rhine, Danube and Euphrates and the northern fringe of the Sahara. The organization of the state was designed primarily for stability—the quality Plato had admired in Pharaonic Egypt and made the prime goal of his Utopia. Nor was the conservatism of the state tempered by any independent organizations for promoting social change or the spread of new ideas: there were no political parties, no trade unions, no learned societies engaged in original experiment, and the only religious movement that offered a programme of change was actively discouraged.

As the Han Dynasty in China reacted against the violent innovations of the Ch'in Emperor while accepting the power they had helped to consolidate, so Augustus reacted against Julius. In particular, he eschewed all attempts (such as Julius would probably have made) to tackle those economic and social problems of which men were not fully aware. He sought remedies for the prevalent disorders along orthodox lines, military and political, working on the assumption that, if military power were concentrated in his hands, he could tolerate such checks as might seem advisable in deference to public opinion on the absoluteness of his political power. As unobtrusively as possible, he inserted a new keystone into the Roman arch—not an hereditary king nor an extra-constitutional Dictator, but a new variety of republican magistrate with the military power of a Consul and the civil power of a Tribune, both capable of being renewed periodically by resolution of the Senate. His titles of *Imperator* and *Princeps* had none of the associations of their derivatives *emperor* and *prince*; they connoted simply 'commander-in-chief' and 'first citizen'. It was possible to believe that this modification of the constitution was only an emergency measure that would not outlive Augustus himself. Many of the Senators certainly believed this, and the belief would probably have been justified if they had been capable of framing any alternative policy that looked beyond the immediate interests of their own class. For it was the strength of the Augustan compromise that it succeeded in balancing the demands of the six competing classes described above, providing something substantial for each, though at the cost of the greater gains each might have hoped for in a more fluid society.

Under the new régime the power of the individual Senator was curbed; but the Senate as a whole was strengthened by the conferment of new powers, while the most distinguished careers were still reserved for its members. The business men found their sphere of operations curtailed by the restriction of tax-farming in favour of direct taxation; but they profited in other fields by the restoration of stable government, and as members of the Equestrian Order they acquired a more definite status with enhanced privileges. To the common people



the Augustan peace was an unmixed blessing; they still (as we have seen) got their 'bread and circuses', and they showed no resentment at the loss of the elective and legislative powers they had used so ineffectively. They cannot have foreseen that they had embarked on the road to the serfdom and the rigid professional caste system of the later Empire. The Provincials, except for a small minority who may have dreamt of regaining national independence, welcomed the change from irresponsible fortune-hunters to governors responsible to the *Imperator*: even in the more peaceable provinces which were left under Senatorial control the strong hand of the central government now made itself felt. The slaves gained immediately from their increased value in a market no longer glutted by war and piracy; but for the same reason their chances of manumission were diminished. Finally, the soldiery had bartered the uncertainties of the civil wars, with their prospect of power and booty, for an assured career of frontier defence and punitive expeditions with adequate provision for maintenance on retirement. They did not at first realize, what they were soon to rediscover with disastrous results, that they were still the real rulers of the Empire.

So, for the moment, everybody was pleased. The prevailing mood of gratitude and relief—the sense that the 'peace of the gods' had been restored—sought expression in religious form. Augustus himself recognized the need for some common worship to unite the citizens of the Roman *cosmopolis*. We have seen that men of many creeds were already beginning to find common ground in a popularized Stoicism. But the conservative Emperor could not give his blessing to any such new experiment. In the provinces he guided and restrained the tendency to worship his own person as successor to Alexander and his heirs and the immemorial dynasties of Divine Kings. In Italy he declined godhead for himself, but allowed his adoptive father to be enrolled among the Olympians as Divine Julius; it was not till after his death that he became officially Divine Augustus. He also made strenuous efforts, with some temporary success, to revive the dying cults of the Latin countryside in the hope of maintaining a genuinely Roman (as distinct from *cosmopolitan*) religion—or perhaps we should rather say *religio*, the force that Polybius had seen as holding together the Roman state.

But a new world was arising in which the old gods could not survive. Men were becoming aware of spiritual needs which could not be met by decking a calf with garlands and sacrificing it to the *genius* of a sacred fount, or by sprinkling a pinch of incense on the altar of Rome and the Emperor. Whatever court poets might say, the Golden Age had not returned under the sway of Rome. The new order was torn by covert strife, especially the perennial struggle of rich and poor. Before long the seer of Patmos was to denounce the imperial city as:

'Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth . . . the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth. . . . By the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.' (*Revelation* xvii & xviii.)

Yet it remains true that Augustus brought a large section of the human race into the quietest haven it has yet encountered on its stormy voyage. The Savage Conqueror, civilized by his captives, had turned his power in good earnest to the task of governing his conquests. The court poets had some justification for their assertion that the historic mission entrusted to the exiled prince of Troy, and through him to the People of Rome, had been fulfilled at last.

Caesar, thy age has brought again  
To wasted fields the teeming grain,  
And to Jove's triumphant walls  
Our eagles from proud Parthian halls;

Has closed in peace rude Janus' gate;  
Banished guilt; made temperate  
Licence that scorned the bridle's hold;  
Has summoned back those arts of old

That glorified the Latin name,  
Gave Rome her strength and spread her fame  
And empire from the gates of morn  
To the sun's Hesperian bourne.

While Caesar guards, no boisterous riot  
Of civil strife will mar our quiet,  
No wrath that whets each blade and frowns  
Vengeful over hapless towns;

No Getic tribes by Danube's spate  
The Julian laws will violate,  
No Seres,<sup>1</sup> nor the faithless son  
Of Persia or of utmost Don.

And we on feasts and holy days,  
While jovial Bacchus' gifts we praise,  
With our wives and children dear  
To the gods will make due prayer.

Ancestral custom following,  
To strains of Lydian flutes we'll sing  
Heroes who died, their work well done,  
Anchises, Troy and Venus' son.<sup>2</sup>

(Horace: *Odes*, iv, 15.)

For the attitude of Augustus' non-Roman subjects, we may quote the words of a Syrian-Greek historian, well qualified to judge the new empire against the background of older conquests and civilizations:

'In his honour the peoples of the earth, by cities and by tribes, throughout continents and islands, establish temples and sacrifices in requital of his own distinguished merit and the benefits he has conferred on them. Here is a man who has reached the highest rank of statesmanship as of power. He has become ruler over more men than any other on record. He has brought security not only to the nations of Greeks and Barbarians but to their minds.' (Nicolas of Damascus: *Life of Augustus*.)

## XVI

### RETROSPECT

#### *The Quest Redefined*

A STAGE is reached in every tour when the mind becomes a whirl of sense impressions—scenes, faces, voices, not yet assigned to their resting-places in the pigeon-holes of memory. Rejecting new gains, it demands a breathing-space to take stock of its own contents.

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese, vaguely known to the Romans as exporters of silk (*sericum*) but beyond the horizon of their diplomatic and military contacts. Augustus did, however, receive envoys from as far afield as southern India.

<sup>2</sup> Aeneas of Troy, son of Anchises and Aphrodité (Venus).

We are abandoning our quest with many rich territories unexplored. The twenty centuries of the Christian era have actualized many varied potentialities of the human race, besides those brought out in the checkered history of the Christian faith itself. They have witnessed striking changes even in conservative China and timeless India; the emergence in the Arabian desert of a militant religion that inspired a new civilization from the Pyrenees to the Himalayas; the culmination and decay in the New World of at least two abortive civilizations whose enigmatic monuments, if they could speak more clearly, might set our problem in a wholly new light; the achievements of Byzantine and Latin civilization in that Middle Age which seems so much more remote from us than the age that went before; and finally that surprising civilization which sprang up, less than five centuries ago, in Western Europe and, armed with the weapons and tools of experimental science, erupted with volcanic force over the whole face of the globe but has failed so disastrously to cope with the problems it has created. But these sixty or so generations have been building on the work of their predecessors. Already, by the 1st Century B.C., we have seen the foundations and the lower courses laid of that structure of institutions and ideas in which we live today. We have seen civilization in the making and the unmaking, both with our own eyes and through the puzzled eyes of wiser men. We are justified in calling a halt to ask whether our travels have brought us any nearer the goal of our quest.

Obviously we cannot crown our labours with a triumphant "Eureka!" It would doubtless be possible, after our study of how certain bricks were built into the fabric of human civilization, to elaborate in some detail the deliberately vague definition of that elusive word with 'which we embarked on our quest. It is not so easy to boil down our findings to a concentrated essence. Civilization (or any particular civilization) cannot be defined by a chemical formula or described and classified like an organic species. It is a general term for a set of miscellaneous experiences that men living in various communities have undergone in the course of history—experiences which have little in common except that they have resulted in lasting changes in 'secondary human nature', *i.e.* human nature as manifested in society. The conclusion that emerges from the foregoing chapters (or the assumption that underlies them) is that men have sought these experiences voluntarily—that they represent in fact the experiences men in anticipation have thought desirable, though they have not usually willed or foreseen the price they would have to pay for them. From this point of view it may be said that *civilization is the process by which men collectively try to get what they want*,<sup>1</sup> with the corollary that, generally speaking, they have got what they wanted, and other things into the bargain.

Whatever else it may be, the history of civilization is certainly the record of men's partially successful struggle to satisfy their wants. Because certain wants remain substantially unchanged, there is an element in history of continuity and predictability. Because there is a clash between one want and another, it is possible to dramatize all history as an Iliad—a conflict of nations or creeds or classes, or even of motives within the individual. Because certain wants are progressively satisfied, the tale may also be told as an Odyssey—a meandering pilgrimage with many a pause for rest and refreshment. Because men oscillate between the satisfaction of incompatible desires, similar extremes leading ultimately to similar reactions, it is possible to shut our eyes to this onward journey and maintain that the vehicle of historic movement is a swing or a roundabout.

<sup>1</sup> It has been objected that, if this is intended as a formal definition of civilization, it should be narrowed down so as to exclude, for instance, the activities of a gang of robbers. Possibly certain collective activities are strictly irrelevant to the civilizing process, but it should be pointed out that the one instance above would be regarded by some theorists as typical of this process during its whole capitalist phase. An alternative definition, in line with p. 314 above, would be: *Civilization is the process by which human life diverges from animal life.*

So, by stressing one aspect or another of this complex process, tidy-minded thinkers have squeezed the welter of events into symmetrical 'philosophies of history'. There is no space here to yield to the temptation of sketching one more such philosophy. But we might follow our clue so far as to attempt a brief review of the events surveyed in our quest, regarding them as episodes in the struggle for the satisfaction of human wants, both material and spiritual. We may broadly distinguish three phases of activity.

### *Three Phases of the Struggle*

In the *First Phase* (of unknown duration) we find men already freed by their gift of imagination from direct dependence on the external world and able to modify their immediate environment (e.g. by lighting fires in cold weather). Yet they were still so closely adapted to their actual surroundings that they can have been conscious of relatively few wants except those which (under favourable conditions) nature could fully satisfy. Living in small communities whose members were conscious of mutual dependence and not divided by class distinctions, they must have found it comparatively easy to reconcile their wants as self-seeking individuals with their wants as companionable members of society. When they fell to wondering what or who provided these gifts of nature, good or bad, which they must passively accept, their imagination conjured up impersonal forces or a personal Superman, immensely powerful but on the whole beneficent. At certain times and places during this phase, men may well have reached a level of contentment which posterity could remember as a Golden Age, though probably this widespread legend was a memory of an ancient hope or dream or ideal rather than of an historical fact. At the same time men were still so helpless that, when things went seriously wrong, there was little they could do to put them right. If the equally widespread legend of a universal flood or other calamity was another memory, dating from the same age of dependence on nature, we may guess that it was in like manner the memory not of an actual occurrence but of a great fear.

Already during this First Phase the human imagination was at work, partly running riot in a world of wishful thinking and nightmare dreads, partly under the control of experience inventing more efficient means to the satisfaction of wants—handier tools, more socially helpful customs, clearer methods of expressing thought and feeling. Thanks mainly to this creative imagination, certain communities achieved such mastery over their environment that they were able to produce by their own labours (though still, of course, in co-operation with nature) the food for which they had formerly been dependent on nature's bounty. This marks the transition to the *Second Phase*, which reached its climax in the ancient civilizations inspected in our First Survey, though its essential characters are just as clearly illustrated by some later civilizations (e.g. those of Mexico and Peru). Its greatest inventions (domestication of the most useful plants and animals, building, weaving, pottery, metalwork, ships, vehicles, writing) were all prehistoric, concentrated in a period which may have begun as late as 6000 B.C. and was certainly concluded before 3000 B.C. In the 3rd Century B.C. Berossus could say with approximate truth that nothing new had been invented since the days of the legendary Oannes, at least thirty centuries before; and for the next fifteen centuries (down to the 13th Century A.D.) the pace of invention was, if anything, slower. These inventions enabled certain men to satisfy certain wants far more completely than had ever been possible during the First Phase. In order to exploit their new powers, men were obliged to co-operate in much larger communities and specialize their functions. In these communities a small minority monopolized the more interesting jobs, including that of regulating the work of others. They maintained their authority largely by inspiring fear—not only the fear of armed force but



In vain he flees for refuge  
To plenitude of riches,  
Who spurns the mighty altar  
Of justice to the void.

(*Agamemnon*, 381-384)

It is clear, however, that the Psalmist is here speaking of God primarily as a force acting upon men, while Aeschylus is talking about men as subject to a universal law, so that in fact both alike may be paraphrased in the words of the proverb: 'Ill gotten gains never prosper.'<sup>1</sup> As a contribution to social problems, a theistic pronouncement differs from a humanistic chiefly by its finality. When Aristotle advances cogent arguments to show that the abolition of private property is contrary to human nature, he lays himself open to counter-arguments. If it is believed that God himself has given his blessing to private property by the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal', it might seem that the last word has been spoken. In practice, however, even in the most conservative of theocracies, the divine commandments have to be re-interpreted and supplemented to meet the changing needs of society, though standards change more slowly in such a community than in one where 'Man is the measure of all things'.

More important, at least in their immediate application, were the differences of opinion as to what type of conduct (and consequently of society) was actually in conformity with the Law of Nature or the Will of God. To some extent the whole of this Third Phase was a reaction against the Second Phase in favour of the First—in other words, a revolt against civilization and a summons to return to the state of nature (greatly idealized). This is explicit in the teaching of the Taoists, the Cynics and the Rechabites (who merely exaggerate the normal attitude of the Hebrew prophets). The Indian reformers in their timeless cosmos did not consciously hark back to an historical or legendary past; but in effect their advocacy of the simple life was a repudiation of the material benefits of civilization. The same applies to ascetic and puritanical movements elsewhere—Mician, Pythagorean, Essene or Christian. On the other hand, there were some who championed the arts and culture of civilized society while seeking to reform it in accordance with the Universal Law. We may instance Zoroaster and much of the Jewish 'Wisdom Literature' (e.g. the praise of 'famous men' and craftsmen in *Ecclesiasticus* xlv and xxxviii). But for a reasoned defence of civilization we must turn to China or Greece.

The Confucians argued that a rightly organized and articulated society, with appropriate class distinctions, has a harmony (*li*) of its own, comparable and complementary to the natural order of the universe: only within such a framework can man develop his innate goodness (Mencius) or curb his innate badness (Hsün-Tze). By this theory they offered a rational justification for the manifold conventions and taboos that had shaped the structure of Chinese society during the Second Phase; and in so doing they helped to perpetuate them in the face of such disruptive forces as the intrusion of Buddhism.

The various Greek cities in their prime provided the theorist with many diverse patterns of civilized community, from the rigid militarism of Sparta, with its suppression of the individual, to the enterprising individualism of Ionia, where the controlling force of the local *nomos* was kept as far as possible in the background. In Periclean Athens it was possible to believe that the conflict between nature and convention had been resolved—that man's nature was not cramped or warped by the bonds of civilized society, but enlarged and invigorated. This view was at least as old as Solon, but it found its perfect expression in Aristotle's formula

<sup>1</sup> So Plato, after demonstrating that 'it does not profit a man to acquire riches wrongfully, since this is to enslave the best part of himself to the basest', clinches the psychological argument with a theological one: 'Whoever will take pains to make himself righteous never goes unheeded by the gods.' (*Republic*, ix, 589; x, 613.)

that the city exists in order that the citizens may live well. In creating such a society, men could feel that they were not flying in the face of Nature or God, but on the contrary fulfilling their 'natural role as 'beings fitted for civilization', actualizing that good life which was the purpose or final cause of their existence.

These advocates of the civilized or artificial life, with its art and music and courtesy, felt obliged to defend at the same time its artificial distinctions between man and man, while trying to find some ground for them in the law of nature. As the Confucians rejected Micius' doctrine that Heaven benefits all men without discrimination, so Aristotle was at pains to confute the Sophistic argument that the natural endowment of Greeks and Barbarians is the same.<sup>1</sup> They sincerely believed (and under the economic conditions of their day they may have been right) that without such distinctions there could be no civilization.

When the Hellenic city-states were being merged in a single state which (like the Chinese Empire) embraced a whole cultural area and more besides, the doctrine of human equality was widely propagated by the Stoics as part of the 'Law of Nature', which was accepted by Roman lawyers as the basis of civil law. But, though distinctions of race and nationality were virtually abolished within the Roman Empire, distinctions of class remained as rigid as in China. As Chinese civilization was challenged by Buddhism, so was Western civilization by Christianity. The early Christians, more whole-heartedly perhaps than any other community, accepted the doctrine of the Universal Law with all its implications and attempted to apply it in practice. Inevitably they were hostile to the Pagan civilization of their day; and, though their successors came to terms with it, they have never quite got over the feeling that this meant rendering a part of God's due to Caesar or Mammon. Probably most Christians at the present day subconsciously think of a shepherd as nearer God than a chauffeur. In theory there may be no reason why a man should not enjoy all the advantages of a developed civilization and at the same time remain in harmony with his fellow creatures and his God. But in practice this is not easy.

The reason why it is not easy was observed long ago. Besides those spiritual and social wants which were emphasized by the reformers of the Third Phase, man has retained other wants—the wants that led him to form the civilizations of the Second Phase. Most moral teachers have been inclined to condemn these wants as sinful or anti-social. A few have had the hardihood to claim that these are man's only real wants, and that his alleged need for inward conformity with a universal law is mere eye-wash: the individual who was lucky or crafty enough to win wealth and power for himself, by whatever means, had nothing to fear from divine justice or (in humanistic language) had satisfied the demands of his own nature and lost nothing by his spiritual breach with society or the universe. This doctrine, which is commonly associated with the name of Epicurus, had been expressed with much less qualification by Aristippus and certain of the Sophists. It had appeared long before in the Egyptian *Banquet Song* and the epic of *Gilgamesh*, and is hinted at by the unknown writer whom we call Ecclesiastes:

'There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour.' (ii, 24.)

It was expressed without disguise by some of the Indian *Nāstikas* and still more bluntly by Yang-Chu:

'If the body has a sufficiency of good food, fine clothes and beautiful women, what more can it desire?'

<sup>1</sup> The same idea of universal equality is expressed in theistic form in the saying of Job (xxxii, 15) about his slave: 'Did not he that made me in the womb make him?'

The advocates of such theories did good service by emphasizing a side of man's nature which no reformer can safely neglect. They had of course no scruple about acclaiming the material benefits of civilization as entirely good; but the social restraints, which had made civilization possible, seemed to them at best to be necessary evils. If they were consistent, they either regarded force and fraud as essential to civilization and praised them accordingly (*cf.* Callicles, Li-Sze, Kautilya), or else they tried to explain society as held together by a reasonable compromise between competing selfish desires on the lines of Lucretius' 'social contract':

That neither should oppress or be oppressed.

If for the purpose of this analysis we include the teaching of the Gospels in the Third Phase as its crowning achievement, this phase may thus be extended to cover some fifteen centuries of the Christian Era. The material progress of the last four centuries entitles them to rank as a *Fourth Phase*, comparable in many ways to the Second but far more rapid in its development. There are signs that the 20th Century has ushered in a *Fifth Phase* on the lines of the Third—an age of large-scale innovation in the social and religious field with its attendant conflicts, disillusionments and martyrdoms.

### *Three Conclusions*

Within the period covered by our Quest we have seen the problem of civilization examined during the Third Phase from many points of view by different theorists and practical reformers whose temperament and experience inclined them to form as many different pictures of nature, both human and universal. In one way or another their teaching had a considerable influence on their respective societies. Their failure to achieve more was due in part to the inadequacy of their theories, which all in various ways over-simplified the problem. They also erred, almost without exception, in looking for a static rather than a dynamic solution—for the right kind of society rather than the right kind of social development. Considered in these terms, the problem today seems insoluble. To a generation nurtured on evolution, relativity and non-Euclidean geometry, the Platonic 'form' of the perfect civilized community appears not only unattainable in practice but inconceivable in theory. The most that the theorist can hope to do is to formulate and illustrate certain very general and elastic principles for the guidance of the practical reformer. Such principles are more likely to be truisms than new discoveries; but it does not follow that they are consistently applied in practice. In reviewing the history of the early civilizations, regarded as experiments in giving men what they want, we can hardly fail to be impressed by the importance of three great truths, ludicrously obvious in themselves but often overlooked in their application both to the past and to the future.

#### (i) *Men want various things*

The object of our study is not a 'rational animal' or 'economic man' or any other abstract symbol, but an old friend of ours, better known to many second-rate novelists, politicians and business men than to many first-rate historians, philosophers and Utopia-builders. He is a creature of many impulses and many moods—sentimental, self-assertive, shy, adventurous, lazy, creative, reflective, frolicsome, frightened, touchy, priggish, perverse, and more things besides than there are adjectives in any language. Human society is made up of human families, with their own problems, jokes and tragedies: not the Happy Families of the *Martinet*, in which Mr. Bones is always and only a butcher and Mr. Snip is inextricably entangled in the threads of his sartorial ideology; still less those biologically pure families or races into which the apostles of Nazidom have divided



men in fancy and striven to divide them in fact. In the biography of the human species, as of its component individuals, we find no single guiding thread, no neatly tabulated stages, but the wayward inconsequence of life.

For such a creature there can be no universal or final form of civilization. In gratifying certain desires he will be forced to forgo the satisfaction of others. In no conceivable society could men fulfil simultaneously and completely the natural human desires for bustling activity and tranquil contemplation, for exciting novelty and restful stability, for individual liberty and social solidarity. In the best of all possible worlds, perhaps, there would be many semi-detached societies, some more nearly stable than others, working out their several ideals in the plastic medium of human character; but all by their very nature would remain imperfect.

(ii) *Within limits, men are free to get what they want*

Men are prone to believe that their efforts are perpetually frustrated and brought to nought by beings other than themselves—that man proposes, and some other power disposes. In the oldest historical records this role is assigned to various mythical personages—gods and goddesses, angels and demons. In the newer mythology these have been replaced by less picturesque figments—the Spirit of the Age, the Logic of Events, the Dialectic of History, Laws that bind nobody, Movements that move nothing, unasked Questions and disembodied Ideas. Some day perhaps a more Spartan breed of historians, equipped with more adequate linguistic resources, may be able to forgo the luxury of worshipping these strange gods.<sup>1</sup> At present it is scarcely possible to express the simplest fact without a lavish use of this misleading imagery. And only too often, like the heathen in his blindness, we mistake these images for realities—horrific monsters that loom menacingly across our path, ready to thwart our best-laid schemes for the welfare of humanity. It is almost a shock, when we rub our eyes and look again, to find that now as always there are only human actors on the scene—just men and women and children and those other animate and inanimate objects whose behaviour we are gradually learning to predict. It is of course always possible that natural forces might be unleashed with a cataclysmic violence or insidious persistence that would defy man's powers of control or self-adaptation. But in recorded history that has never happened on a big scale. Whatever God or Devil we can find in human history works only through the promptings of the human heart: if we can introduce a little moderation and method into our proposals, the disposal is in our own hands.

The natural resources of this planet suffice to supply all the primary needs of its present human population, or even of a considerably larger one: in other words, they suffice to maintain all mankind in good bodily health, well fed, smartly dressed, comfortably housed. Thanks to experimental science, the means of satisfying these needs—of solving the purely economic problem—are now for the first time in history ready to our hands. But, for various non-economic reasons, we do not use them. The problems that confront us today are social and religious. We must grapple somehow with the emotional needs we feel in our relations with our fellow men and with the universe as a whole, whether we conceive it as impersonal Nature or as a personal God. Doubtless these problems are not wholly soluble, because men by nature are not 'pure in heart'—that is to say, they have mixed motives, conflicting desires. We want to see through our fellows, to use them for our own ends, to dominate, even to bully them; but we also want companionship, sympathy, love. We want to analyse Nature, to investigate it in the coldly sceptical spirit which alone can give us the knowledge that is power;

<sup>1</sup> The author of this book set out with the resolve that he would never invoke abstractions as agents and would even fight shy of them as grammatical subjects; but every page is littered with his failures.

but we also want to bow down in ecstatic adoration—'to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever'. In the study of men's multifarious social and religious structures we can see how these contradictions inherent in human nature have imposed a limit to the fulfilment of human desires—a limit as insurmountable as that imposed by the brute facts of the material world. But within these limits we are free—and we have no idea how wide the limits are.

(iii) *Men are never satisfied*

It is obvious that in any highly civilized community all men to some extent, and some men to a very great extent, are able to satisfy wants that could not be satisfied at an earlier stage in the civilizing process. It is equally obvious that civilized men are not more contented than the uncivilized—rather the contrary. As a modern writer has put it: 'Civilization, instead of increasing our contents, merely augments the possibilities of discontents.'<sup>1</sup> This is partly due, no doubt, to the uneven distribution of its benefits. More fundamentally, it is due to the familiar psychological fact that, so long as men remain actively alive, the satisfaction of one want means the stimulation of another. To Carlyle's question: 'Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake in joint stock company to make one Shoeblack HAPPY?' there can be but the one answer: 'They cannot accomplish it, above an hour or two.'<sup>2</sup> In this vain struggle to satisfy that insatiable shoeblack, the average specimen of humanity, we have a true picture of progressive civilization. To those who believe that this state of unsatisfied desire is bad in itself—that only *nirvāna* is good—the poor shoeblack is the 'wretchedest of mortals, and to fill his life with new and varied experiences, and so torment him with new desires, is to do him the worst of disservices. The champions of civilization, on the other hand, will rejoice that it does not seem likely to culminate in any *Brave New World*, in which 'people get what they want and never want what they can't get'. They will agree with count Keyserling:

'The prevailing belief that, if every desire could be satisfied, all would be well and end well is the great mistake, the primordial mistake of thinking man. For the truth is exactly the opposite of this belief.' (*The Art of Life* [English edition 1937], p. 242.)<sup>3</sup>

In the life of the community, as of the individual, there are moods in which men are not acutely aware of unsatisfied wants. But these alternate with eras of change, in which they are struggling to satisfy a luxuriant growth of wants that outstrips the increasing means of satisfaction. In such epochs there are always some men who argue that happiness is to be found only in standing aside from this wild-goose chase and accepting the standards of some earlier, slower-moving age. These critics are the vanguard of a reaction that eventually diverts the current of 'progress', turning men's desires into another channel. Sometimes, possibly under the pretext of trying to eliminate desire altogether, they may stimulate the religious side of man's nature and sharpen the hunger of the soul for mystic union with the divine. The resultant ages of faith or reverence are less obviously 'progressive' than ages when the dominant desire is for wealth or power or knowledge or freedom; but we may discern in them a spiritual progress that runs its own course and provokes its own reaction towards a keener awareness of men's worldly wants. Of course none of these wants is ever quite suppressed: every age affords examples of that clash of temperaments that aligned Chinese sages into the same camps as Christian sectaries and set Greek philosophers disputing over

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Bell: *Silver Ley*.

<sup>2</sup> Sartor Resartus; *The Everlasting Yea*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Heraclitus (110) 'The fulfilment of all men's desires would not be to their advantage.'

the same issues as divide present-day scientists. But we cannot expect that even the most progressive civilization should give free play to every conceivable human impulse at the same time, and there are some impulses that must always be held in check if the process is to continue at all. Certain desires are 'anti-social': they can be gratified only by a few individuals at the expense of the rest. Others are anti-religious, or we might say 'anti-vital', calculated to decrease men's powers of enjoying life. All such desires are symptoms of social maladies which, if they went too far, would end in the destruction of the society by violence or inertia. But, while it would be dangerous to stimulate them, it might be still more dangerous to suppress them altogether.

If the destructive impulses really outweigh the sociable, creative and exploratory ones, then no expedient will save the human race from doom. But the adventure of civilization is based on the faith that the desire for 'more life and fuller' will prevail; that men can be trusted to find out, by trial and error if need be, what they really want and how they are to get it; that, as they acquire new powers, or 'actualize new potentialities', they will learn in time to use them in the service of life, not of death; that, in developing their own natures, they are acting in harmony with Nature as a whole, or with the purpose of God.

THE END

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